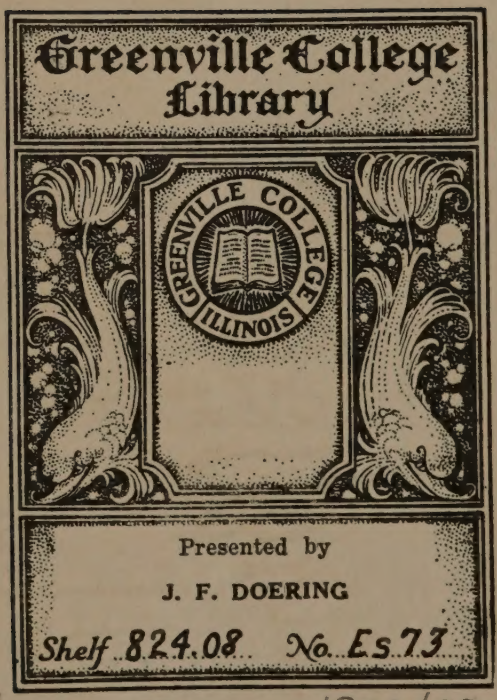

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ESSAYS OF THE YEAR

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PUBLISHED AT THE OFFICES OF THE
ARGONAUT PRESS
175, PICCADILLY, LONDON

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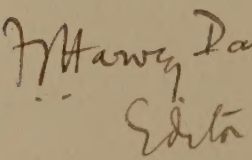

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The thanks of the Argonaut Press are due to the Authors, and to the Editors and Publishers of the periodicals mentioned, for permission to use the essays in this volume.

The prefatory ESSAY ON ESSAYS *was written without reference to the collection itself, for which Mr. Squire is in no way responsible.*

AN ESSAY ON ESSAYS

By J. C. Squire

IF the whole field of literature, old and new, be regarded, the "term" essay seems incapable of satisfactory definition. The Oxford Dictionary provides something which has the surface appearance of a definition, but it does not take us very far:

> A composition of moderate length on any particular subject, or branch of a subject; originally implying want of finish, "an irregular undigested piece" (J.), but now said of a composition more or less elaborate in style, though limited in range.

This, as a piece of English, is as awkward as it is nebulous. "Of moderate length" is not too specific; nor is "more or less"; as for "now said of," it makes me feel that I should like the sentence parsed. And why "*though* limited"? Have not cherry-stones been carved? However, there we are: the definition is vague because of the vague outlines of the thing defined. There is an essay on Population

and an essay on Cheese—which latter is by Mr. Chesterton, and begins with the lines:

> Stilton, thou should'st be living at this hour,
> And so thou art!

There is an essay on the Principles of the Turbines and an essay, more romantic than technical, on Picking up Moorings. Charles Lamb wrote an essay on Roast Pig and another on the children who were never born to him; Lord Macaulay wrote, at greater length, an essay on Lord Burghley; and Lord Bryce at still greater (though, doubtless, "moderate") length, an essay on The Holy Roman Empire, which was published as a book—a book of moderate length. To one scholar the word "essay" suggests something solid on Tensions or Fluxions, richly adorned with Greek letters, logarithms, and the signs for roots. To another scholar it suggests a thoughtful and well-annotated compilation of thirty thousand words on the Council of Trent, the main purpose of which is to win him a prize or a fellowship. To a scholar of humbler type the term instantly conjures up a picture of himself reading a brief and feebly epigrammatic paper on "The Causes of Cromwell's Greatness" to a suspicious tutor; and there are millions of the young to whom the word means one page

of banal thoughts, produced with agony, on "Where I Went for My Holiday."

A slight narrowing down is perceptible if we begin to think of the word "essayist" instead of the word "essay." The pure scientists, philosophers, economists and historians fall out of notice. Nobody, for all the fame of his alarming essay, ever brackets the Rev. Mr. Malthus with Lamb and Hazlitt as one of the essayists of the Romantic Revival; even Matthew Arnold, for all the merit and celebrity of the so-called "Essays in Criticism," would probably be omitted from any man's list of English Essayists. That list, beginning with Bacon—who derived from Montaigne, the father of them all—would contain the names of Cowley and Addison, Steele and Johnson, Hazlitt and Lamb and many moderns. And it would be found that all these writers have certain qualities in common, though the proportionate importance of these qualities may vary from man to man. Personality is conspicuous, for one thing; so is a discursiveness which permits the introduction of any entertaining thought, anecdote or quotation provided it can be made to appear rooted, however slightly, in its surroundings. As a rule, these authors' essays are not systematic or exhaustive: they resemble the tangled her-

baceous border rather than the trim parterre. Humour is not excluded from them and, although they may be instructive, their principal object is to delight. In fact . . .

But here is an example! Much more of this, and the present essay itself will prove to be no true essay. The grim shadow of the planner and the classifier already looms over it. No hedge has been leaped for casual blooms, nothing irresponsible has been said, not a joke has illuminated the bleak grey common-sensible landscape [1]; we begin to suspect the existence of a preliminary synopsis, with its A, B, C, A_1, B_1 and C_1, larger and lesser brackets, notes for exordium and synoptical peroration, a rigidly designed thing meant to secure the covering of the ground, so that no important consideration is omitted and none but an arrant carper could pick holes in the argument. That temptation to exhaust a field, to say the last word, to usurp the privileges of Providence and know everything, is one that the true essayist resists in proportion as he is a true essayist. Johnson, in the soberer of his short papers, was on the farther flank of the glittering host; Hazlitt is well in the middle; Lamb, who hated systematizers

[1] "Landskip" perhaps would indicate more "more or less" elaboration of style.

(unless they were fantastic to a comic degree), and loved chiefly the perpetually surprising Fullers and Brownes, is the true essayist in his purest form, a rambler, a vagrant, a lover of the particular rather than of the general, a creature of chameleon moods which make the texture of his pages a tapestry of varied dyes. Conceive an essay, entitled Dream-Children, by a really learned man, preferably Scotch, with a zeal for exactitude and adequate explanation, an essay to which James Mill and Jeremy Bentham would unreservedly allow the name! The annals of literature would be scoured for parallel examples; a questionnaire would be sent out to a thousand people asking them to describe the children, if any, of their dreams, with notes relating to circumstances conceived to be favourable or unfavourable to the generation of such dreams; and then the tabulation would begin. Thirty-two per cent. of men and forty-five per cent. of women appear [1] to hanker, on an average of eleven times a year, for a single unborn child—the child yearned for being, with both sexes, a boy in fifty-one per cent. of cases and a girl in forty-nine per cent. Two children are present in the reveries

[1] Figures subject of course to possible correction when Dr. Schultz of Gottingen has completed his far more exhaustive statistical inquiry.

of forty-seven per cent. of men and twenty-one per cent. of women. . . . The most important discoverable causes of yearning are, in the order named, disturbance of the mastoid gland, injudicious diet, and the perusal of a notorious essay by the unstable, if gifted, Charles Lamb. A residue of witnesses obstinately insist that they toy fondly with the thoughts of children because they really wish that they had had children: this view is, of course, a vulgar error, thoroughly superficial, and based on a complete unawareness of the operations both of the subconscious and of the alimentary duct.

Where was I? Never mind. But what I really wanted to say was this. The notion of an essayist changes from one age to another. Roughly speaking, any particular generation will regard as a typical essayist a man who practises the form, or one of the forms, of essay most cultivated in its own day. And here we encounter the economic determinant. The typical essay of our own time is different from its predecessors in several respects. For one thing, it is usually produced to fill a column in a daily newspaper or a page in a weekly, and it is the work of a literary journalist at a time when literary journalism has become a "whole-time" profession. Mr. Max Beerbohm, serene

in his secluded tower, may let a conception take shape and slowly ripen, may sketch an essay, may "more or less elaborate" it, may put it back into a drawer as an angler returns an immature fish to a river, may take it out from time to time, adding a paragraph here, deleting a sentence there, elsewhere, after long cogitation, substituting for a hackneyed word a word of which no man but he could have thought, and ultimately may "release" the perfect thing to a world which has almost despaired of ever hearing from him again. But did we to-day imitate our ancestors who brought out "The British Essayists" of *Spectator*, *Tatler*, *Idler*, etc. in a many-volumed collection, few of our living practitioners of the art would be found to have written essays either as long as Mr. Beerbohm's or as carefully written. The difference between his work and that of the most brilliant of his contemporaries is like the difference between a painting by Vermeer and a sketch by Phil May. But, after all, why not frankly recognize the diversity of kinds, and enjoy both? We may suspect, or even know, that an habitual essayist of our acquaintance sits down to do his regular weekly essay a few hours before it is due for delivery, groans because he hasn't a subject, feverishly glances over the newspapers in the

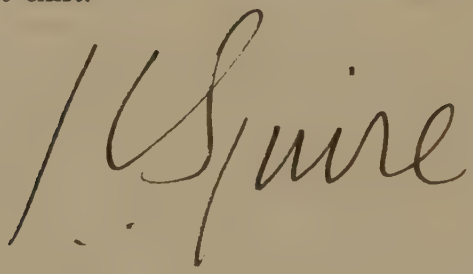
hope of finding one, tries desperately to remember if he was talking about anything useful at lunch, then remembers that he took a Ride on a Bus yesterday, and writes about that, or finally reconciles himself to a Complete Absence of Ideas and writes about that. Yet why an *a priori* complaint? There is an essay in the proverb about the Proof of the Pudding. Working even under these conditions some of our contemporaries have (though inequality of production is inevitable) written scores of the most delightful short prose compositions in the language—compositions full of humour, of wit, of tenderness, of sagacity, of fancy, with pages of description as good as the best of Stevenson's, of whimsicality as rollicking as Sterne's, of sustained writing whose grave eloquence may stand unshamed beside that of Raleigh's valedictory in the *History of the World*. I dare not suggest which of our most popular essayists, who include Messrs. Belloc, Chesterton, Lynd, Lucas, Gardiner, Milne, Priestley, Knox, Gould, Brown (I wish I could remember more —there is safety in numbers) have, on occasion, written with such haste as I have mentioned: did I conjecture too precisely I might find that even what was meant as a great tribute might be held to be libellous. But I am constrained, without prejudice (which phrase I superstiti-

tiously believe to be, in almost any connection, a legally recognized amulet), to mention their names, for, as a body, they have enriched my own life as they must have enriched the lives of thousands of others. The hyper-fastidious sometimes grumble at them: the answer is that one should not look a gift-horse in the mouth.

That is the second or third atrociously familiar proverb that I have quoted: this essay, which narrowly escaped the Scylla of the systematic, is now swirling into the Charybdis of the sententious. Bacon was sententious enough; but he at least coined his own phrases. What would Charles Lamb do in this predicament? Bethink him, perhaps, of a Defence of Stock Phrases—but no, that sounds more like Mr. Chesterton, who will defend anything, especially the indefensible, but with a miraculous skill which, in this instance, would make the old lamps look like new ones. Think of the noble caparison in which the gift-horses, guerdon of paladins, would prance across his pages, with oriflammes flying, and clarions ringing. I think I can hear Mr. Belloc describing an adventure with a horse, a brute of a horse, presented to him by a rich man: as soon as he went near its mouth it bit him: "This is true. Whether

you believe it or not is your own affair." And Mr. Lynd, with references to horses in the *Golden Bough*, and, for he accepts nothing without question, the pertinent suggestion that if the Trojans had examined the mouth of the most notable of all gift-horses they might have saved themselves an immensity of trouble.

The cocks are all crowing, and I must go to bed. If I only had a copy of this book I should take it up with me and read it. Unhappily, at the moment of writing, it does not exist.



ESSAYS OF THE YEAR

THE GRAND MANNER: THOUGHTS UPON "A TALE OF TWO CITIES"

By John Drinkwater

I

THIS age is sometimes reproached with having lost the taste for literature on the grand scale. People have no time, we are told, for works of abundant design. With *The Dawn in Britain, The Dynasts, The Forsyte Saga, Back to Methuselah,* the novels of Mr. Wells, Mr. Bennett and Mr. Walpole, and such epic undertakings as Mr. Noyes's *Torchbearers* before us, to choose our examples arbitrarily, the charge cannot seem to be a carefully considered one. And yet its origins are not altogether obscure. Fashionable and even impressive reputations are to-day undoubtedly built on a very slender volume of work. Sometimes they are justified; as in the cases of Mrs. Meynell, Mr. A. E. Housman, and Mr. Ralph Hodgson; one might possibly include Mr. Max Beerbohm. But frequently they seem hardly to be justified at all. People who have before

them the whole range of literature, and at least profess some acquaintance with a representative selection of it, speak in perfervid tones of writers who in ten years have produced a little book or so of essays, a novelette or two, or have perhaps spent their genius on middle articles in the weekly magazines. If you want to talk smartly among the coteries about literature you may be grateful to authors whose range you can comprehend in an easy sitting or two. It is, for example, much easier to have an exhaustive knowledge of Mr. Lytton Strachey's work than it is to have it of Walter Savage Landor's, and yet, although Mr. Strachey is so well worth knowing, Landor can hardly be said to be less so. The circles, and they are not uninfluential ones, that encourage this somewhat limited, not to say precious, taste inevitably tend to overlook a certain characteristic that has commonly marked the men who have made the great literature of the world.

Volubility of production, far from being necessarily a virtue in literature, is often extremely tiresome, but fertility of invention has almost invariably been one of the signs of greatness. Some of the worst best-sellers of our own time have also been among the most prolific writers, but to read a little of their

work is to discover that fertility of invention is precisely the thing that is lacking. With a very few exceptions the men who have made abiding names in literature have produced rapidly, with a great variety of material and design, and with an intense application that invests every moment of their work with significance. Their creation is marked not only by profusion but by toughness of texture. Mere volubility released by a formula makes no inroads on nervous energy, but the nervous energy that went to the fashioning of *Macbeth*, of a single book of *Paradise Lost* or of *The Ring and the Book*, of *Tom Jones*, of *The Prelude*, of *The Return of the Native*, of *Heartbreak House*, is gigantic. And each of these works represents not a tithe of its author's accumulated output. The pressure that we find in them has in each case been maintained relentlessly over a long number of years, and the fertility, though it may have fluctuated, has never failed. The great men who have died young have shown the same insatiable vigour during their short tenure of life; Keats, Shelley, Byron, Burns, and the rest of them, all drew from sources that welled up not only brightly, but continually and, so long as life lasted, inexhaustibly. Genius of the first order may sometimes be found in slight and spasmodic manifestations,

but the fact remains that such genius does nearly always coincide with an almost wanton fecundity of production.

Any reading or re-reading of Dickens brings this reflection home to us with renewed force. Perhaps no writer of the nineteenth century is so easy a mark as he for hostile criticism, but certainly no one of that age is more indisputably a great writer. In that long row of novels, faults of taste, of sentiment, of creative tact and of understanding abound. But there also is a fertility of invention such as has hardly been excelled by any writer of our race. Any small intelligence can go into the world that Charles Dickens created and detect a hundred things to be put right, but it has to be a very small intelligence indeed not to perceive that here is a world such as can be achieved only by the richest creative faculty. Here is no slight and elegant discursion that impinges agreeably upon our own experience and appeals to the standards of that experience for its prestige. When we enter the world of Dickens we have to recognize that the divine right is his, not ours, that he is the authority which sets the standards, and that before we can learn what there is to be learnt we must make a long and adventurous journey the nature of which cannot be revealed in an epigram on our return.

II

A Tale of Two Cities appeared in 1859, when Dickens was forty-seven years old. By many of the novelist's admirers it is, I believe, held in less esteem than many of his other works, and, whether this opinion is reasonable or not, it is clear that wide as Dickens's range was, the story is conceived in a manner that was for him unusual. Its minutely devised historical background and its swift concentration of plot are alike apart from his common practice. In his Preface to the book Dickens expressed his hope of adding "something to the popular and picturesque means of understanding that terrible time," without, as he says, any intention of competing with the philosophic insight of Carlyle's *French Revolution*. In this aim Dickens may be said to have succeeded with the assurance of a master. To read this story is in the first place happily to forget that there is any such thing as historical accuracy. This is not to say that Dickens is astray with his facts, or even that he manipulates them, but to observe that while we are reading we are convinced by the obvious truth of the picture presented that it has a sufficient foundation in reality. The Terror was, unlike many of the great spectacles

of history, rightly named, and it is terror that is the figure brooding over these pages. The notes of doom that are sounded in the beginning may here and there be sounded a little spectacularly, but if Dickens was always something of a showman he was at least a showman to good purpose. Surrounding the romantic pathos of Dr. Manette and his daughter and Charles Darnay and Mr. Lorry, there is to be impressed upon us a sense of huge forces set in motion presently to culminate in an avalanche of disaster. This Dickens does sometimes by direct statement, but more subtly by undertones in the early passages of Sydney Carton's career. This figure, shadowy at first, and with little apparently of grace or character to commend it, drifts into the difficult yet sunny orbit of the Manette circle, and we know that an influence has come into the story which, although we cannot yet define it, will take us beyond the scope of the domestic issues that are engaging us. Dr. Manette's previous history and the circumstances of Darnay's presence in England, plain as they are, are a less striking prelude to the development that is to follow than this masterly introduction of Carton into the narrative. It is, it seems to me, a refinement of skill in Dickens to make this effect explicitly in the early chapters

through Manette and Darnay, to leave that effect nevertheless incompletely established in our minds, and then to strike it into perfect emphasis by means of Carton, who for some time is not explicit at all.

The homage that Dickens paid to Carlyle was modest and charming, and no one who reads Carlyle at this time of day will consider it undeserved. And yet the philosophic bearings of the history from which the tale is evolved by no means escaped Dickens himself. He saw with an intensity as vehement as Carlyle's own that given causes will produce their effects with the inevitability of Greek tragedy. I do not know where the particular causes that produced the French Revolution are defined in more human terms than in *A Tale of Two Cities*. And Dickens keeps the balance quite clearly. His unflinching scrutiny of the cynical wickedness that led to the Terror does not for a moment deceive him into a sentimental sympathy for the barbarities by which the Terror was accompanied. In the various passages where he explores this aspect of his theme Dickens achieves a vision that is at once detached and passionate, and has moments that remind us of the Athenian theatre and of *The Dynasts*.

III

Although *A Tale of Two Cities* is less elaborate in detail than many of Dickens's works, its detail is no less vivid and compact. Some people may prefer Dickens in other kinds of story, but few will deny that he seldom planned a story so logically and directly. What Dickens might have been as a dramatist had he had a living theatre to work for we cannot tell, but in *A Tale of Two Cities* he shows not only that he had a gift for dramatic moments, which indeed he shows in all his work, but also that he could contrive a firm dramatic outline. But in doing this he never allowed the necessity for swift movement to impair the quality of his detail, and we know that it is in this respect that many writers with a dramatic sense, among them not a few of the dramatists themselves, fail. The reader will not need to be directed to examples of such admirable detail in *A Tale of Two Cities*, but two or three may be given here. How clearly in four lines do we realize Charles Darnay in the dock as he sees himself reflected in the mirror above his head:

> . . . Be that as it may, a change in his position making him conscious of a bar of light across his face, he looked up; and when he saw the glass his

face flushed, and his right hand pushed the herbs away. . . .

What a world of intuition about the refinements of apparently commonplace character do we find in this of Mr. Lorry and Miss Pross :

. . . Mr. Lorry knew Miss Pross to be very jealous, but he also knew her by this time to be, beneath the surface of her eccentricity, one of those unselfish creatures—found only among women—who will, for pure love and admiration, bind themselves willing slaves, to youth when they have lost it, to beauty that they never had, to accomplishments that they were never fortunate enough to gain, to bright hopes that never shone upon their own sombre lives. He knew enough of the world to know that there is nothing in it better than the faithful service of the heart ; so rendered and so free from any mercenary taint, he had such an exalted respect for it, that, in the retributive arrangements made by his own mind —we all make such arrangements, more or less—he stationed Miss Pross much nearer to the lower angels than many ladies immeasurably better got up both by nature and art, who had balances at Tellson's. . . .

And, finally, at rather greater length, is there not here presented a whole social order and the premonition of its dissolution ?

. . . Monseigneur, one of the great lords in power at the Court, held his fortnightly reception in his grand hotel in Paris. Monseigneur was in his inner room, his sanctuary of sanctuaries, the Holiest of Holiests to the crowd of worshippers in the suite of rooms without. Monseigneur was about to take his

chocolate. Monseigneur could swallow a great many things with ease, and was by some few sullen minds supposed to be rather rapidly swallowing France; but his morning's chocolate could not so much as get into the throat of Monseigneur, without the aid of four strong men besides the cook.

Yes. It took four men, all four ablaze with gorgeous decoration, and the chief of them unable to exist with fewer than two gold watches in his pocket, emulative of the noble and chaste fashion set by Monseigneur, to conduct the happy chocolate to Monseigneur's lips. One lacquey carried the chocolate-pot into the sacred presence; a second milled and frothed the chocolate with the little instrument he bore for that function; a third presented the favoured napkin; a fourth (he of the two gold watches) poured the chocolate out. It was impossible for Monseigneur to dispense with one of these attendants on the chocolate and hold his high place under the admiring heavens. Deep would have been the blot upon his escutcheon if his chocolate had been ignobly waited on by only three men; he must have died of two. . . .

Writing like this would in any case be distinguished, but when it is characteristic of a power that was sustained for thirty years at constant pressure we know that we are in the presence of not only a distinguished but a great writer.

IV

Æsthetic theories are constantly being strained to breaking-point when they are applied to any specific work of art. And yet

criticism that has no reference to any æsthetic theories at all is a more than usually ineffective beating of wings in a void. *A Tale of Two Cities* is a magnificent story, told with all the resources of a great writer in full play. We might very well be content to leave it at that with homage and gratitude. And yet in one respect it seems to me that it is not completely a masterpiece. In the vivid movement of event, in sense of character, in tenderness of sympathy, in discernment of human motives, in visualizing skill and in ripeness of reflection, Dickens here succeeds with almost unfailing certainty. While the design of the story, in so far as Sydney Carton is its dominating figure, is tragic, its effect is not exhilarating as it should be, but depressing. This perhaps is a rather more heavily weighted charge than I quite mean it to be, but I find that Carton's death definitely fills me with gloom instead of bracing me. Supreme control of a tragic issue is a gift that has been denied even to many of the great writers, and I hope that I have made it clear that it is with no lack of admiration that I suggest that Dickens was one of those many. It might even seem that he himself was conscious that he was not by natural processes of development going to impart to Carton's end that exultation which he knew as well as any-

body to be essential to great tragic art. Carton's dying speech, or what amounts to his dying speech, full of assurance as it is obviously intended to be, is in itself, or so it seems to me, such a confession. It is no doubt a highly immoral attitude to take about it, but for myself I cannot help regretting Carton's death rather than rejoicing in Darnay's escape, which obviously is the last thing that Dickens meant his readers to do. But this is always the way with tragic creations. Either you control them with complete tragic power or they run away with you. Carton is a tragic creation, plainly the only truly tragic creation in the book; in the end Dickens fails so to control him, and Carton in some degree destroys his creator's underlying purpose. What is called sentimentality is continually being urged as a fault against writers of all kinds, and often quite stupidly. Dickens himself over and over again shows to what admirable purpose this same sentimentality may be put, but the one occasion when its use is inevitably mistaken is the tragic occasion. This gift of sentiment, so beautifully employed by Dickens in general use, was misapplied to Carton, and weakens the catastrophe of a story that is otherwise splendidly worthy of its heroic theme.

ON SPELLING

By Hilaire Belloc

WHAT fun our posterity will have with our ridiculous worship of spelling!

It has not lasted very long. There has not really been such a thing as spelling for much more than two hundred years in English, and there was no religion of it till perhaps a hundred years ago. Even as it is, the two classes which have most tradition in them, the aristocrats and the workers on the land, care least about it.

I myself write as one emancipated. Time was when I trembled at the thought of a misspelt word and a blunder of my own or the printer's would keep me awake at night; but now that I have recognized it for the least part of scholarship, and, indeed, hardly a part of scholarship at all, I care for it less than a doit —whatever that may be.

English of all languages ought to be most indifferent to spelling, for upon spelling the sense of its words and phrases hardly ever

depends. It is not so with Latin, it is not even so with French, but it is so with English. Here and there you have an ambiguity, as in "Affect" and "Effect," but by and large it does not really count.

I suppose the passion for exact uniformity in spelling goes with all that modern attention to things anyone can do, things that demand no intelligence, things mechanical and of a pattern. It is fostered, of course, by the State educational machine and by the enormous extension of mere print, but its root must lie in the passion for mechanical simplicity and for things in which that man will most advance who is least able to think. It goes with the craze for measurement and with the enormous fatuity that only those things can be known which can be exactly measured, and with that other twin fatuity that when things are measured they are known. It goes with the habit of asking "how broad?" "how high?" "how old?" "how long?" instead of "what is its quality?"

Our fathers cared so little for the ridiculous thing that they did not even spell their own names the same way throughout their lives, and as for common words they seem to have had an instinct which I cannot but applaud for ennobling them with repetitions of letters

and flourishes, with the pretty trick of using a "y" for an "i" and doubling consonants. In general they were all for festooning and decorating, which is a very honest and noble taste. When they said of a man "I esteam hym ne moore than a pygge" one knows what they meant and one feels their contempt vibrating. Put into the present stereotyped form it would far less affect, or effect, us.

And talking of "stereotyped," there, if you like, is an example of modern spelling! What do you suppose King Henry, the Eighth of that name, would have made of it? But for the matter of that, how little any of those men who made the English language (and I put Cranmer at the head of them) would have tolerated our immense rubbish heap of long words, not one in fifty of which we know the true meaning of? I suppose that in words ending with "logy" alone there are enough to equal all the vocabulary of the aforesaid Cranmer. There must be hundreds upon hundreds; and by the custom of our time anyone may make up new words ending in "logy" at will with none to chasten him.

Spelling is a great breeder of hatred among the nations and of divisions, misapprehensions, wars—or as our fathers more splendidly put it (to a roll of drums) "Warres"; as also of

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Dissencyons and Broils. Here myself I confess to the weakness; to see "labour" spelt "labor" makes me see red. It makes all that is ancient in England see red; and the more openly we admit it the better for international and domestic peace.

Now that this word "labor" should be so abhorrent to the intimate taste of the English mind is a very good reply to the pedants who will defend spelling as a reminder of the origin of words. "Labor" is right. "Labour" is a twisted thing, coming round by way of a dead French usage. You may say, of course, if you like, that even so, it teaches you a little history and that at least such spelling reminds you that the gentry were French before they were English. But if you say this you lie; for it teaches people nothing of the sort, and such few people as hear this truth about the English gentry only fall into a passion and disbelieve it.

Again, who when he comes across a little word "ink" considers that imperial liquid which only the Basileus on his Constantinopolitan throne could use for his most awful signature? If there is one word the spelling of which ought to teach every child the whole story of Europe and of the great Byzantine centre thereof it is the little word "ink"—

and it teaches nothing at all. Neither, for that matter, does Constantinopolitan, hard as it is to spell.

No, all that talk of spelling teaching one the past of words and things is nonsense. If there was any sense in it we should spell the Canon of a Cathedral after the same way in which we spell a gun. They are the same word; and yet I suppose there is not one man in 20,000 who would not ridicule the spelling of the Piece with one " n " and of the Ecclesiastic with two. For my part, if I had to give the extra " n " to either I should give it to the cleric, as one of God's creatures and a hierarch and therefore infinitely nobler than a piece of brute metal.

Spelling also panders to the vices of men, and more particularly to social pride. Many a man has lost his soul by putting a redundant " e " at the end of his name to borrow a false rank therefrom. I could quote you the case of at least one peer whose father actually had the name of his titular village misspelt on the map in order to make himself look mediaeval. So it is with the people who use two little f's instead of one big f at the beginning of their surnames. They are ffools. In the same way men with foreign names, if those names are of a common sort, will respell them into English; but if they are of the nobler kind it is the other

way about—they will turn them from plain English into something Frenchified so as to look as though they were descended, not from tripe-sellers, as they are indeed, but from great barons of the thirteenth century. Thus a man called Roach because one of his forbears had a fish-face, will call himself " de la Roche " ; or a man called Lemon because his forbear was too yellow, will call himself " L'Hémon," which is ridiculous. And such men often tell one of two lies : they either say they are descended from Huguenots or are from the Channel Islands.

And all this reminds me that one of the surest ways of insulting a man without risk is to misspell his name. The reason of this (the " psychology " of it, as people say who like to show they can spell) is that every man thinks his name of importance to the whole world and either known to the whole world or deserving so to be known. It is a very fine example of vanity. For after all, if the usurpers out of Carnarvonshire remained indifferent (as they did) to being spelt Tydder, Tydr, Tyddr, Tuder, or Tudor, why should we, below the rank of kings, make a fuss about it ?

Spell, therefore, at your own sweet will. I not only give you leave of charter so to do, but will at call support you with argument.

Only I warn you of one thing: if you do, you are in for lifelong war with the printers, and they are a powerful and close corporation. For now forty years have I attempted most firmly to fix and root the right phrase "an historian" into the noblest pages of English, but the bastard "a historian" is still fighting hard for his miserable life and may yet survive.

SOME BEGINNINGS

By John Bailey

NO one, or no one who has any sense of art, has ever sat down to write a book without an anxious consciousness of the importance of its opening words. On the first line of a poem, the first sentence or chapter of a book, more probably than on any other, with the possible exception of the last, hangs the success or failure of the whole. It lies with first words to arrest attention, to capture interest, to strike a keynote. They are a promise and a programme, which must contain enough to excite but not enough to fatigue: they must tell something, but not too much, of what is to follow: they are that right sort of text which contains the subject of the sermon, but sets us asking how it will be developed.

These are all great uses, and, though they may not be the greatest, they are to be seen in the work of some of the greatest men. Our own greatest of all, perhaps because he is a

dramatist, does not indeed exhibit these or any other features marking off the beginning from the body of his plays. The most that can be said about his habits in this matter is that he occasionally strikes the note of his play in the opening scene, so that it has more meaning when we look back at it after reading the whole than it had at first sight. This is notably true of *Romeo and Juliet*, where the brawling servants are soon shown to have been a prophecy of bloodier brawling among their betters; and of *Coriolanus*, where the follies of the mob had at once to be set out or there could be no excuse at all for the insolence of Coriolanus which, with them, is to make the drama; and of *Macbeth*, where the witches appropriately speak the first words of the most supernatural and superstitious of Shakespeare's plays; and of *Antony*, where the Roman soldiers' words about "this dotage of our general" give in the first line of the first scene the note of the whole, which all turns precisely on the struggle between Rome and that dotage. But these are exceptions. As a rule there is in Shakespeare nothing more arresting, or even more significant, in the first scene than in any other. But with Shakespeare's epic rivals the case is different. In many or most of them their very first words are highly charged with significance.

"*Μῆνιν ἄειδε*," "Arma virumque," "Le donne, i cavalier, l'arme, gli amori," "Of man's first disobedience" are all exactly the things of which we spoke: they are promise, programme, keynote, arousing attention and expectation. And the poems which follow keep to the key and perform the programme. But at least one of these, the "arma virumque" of the *Æneid*, is as far as possible from suggesting the greatest qualities of its author. There is in those words no hint either of the miraculous art of Virgil or of those brooding sympathies and questionings of his which travel so far beyond and above any world of war. And of the other first lines only one, perhaps, the opening of *Paradise Lost*, gives the poet as well as the poem. It begins a long sentence of several lines and tells us at once of the art which never flags or fails, which disdains epigram and requires "planetary wheelings," the vast motions and high music of the spheres, for its expression. And it also speaks at once of the high and stern nature of the artist poet.

And this last, perhaps, if not the most important, is the most interesting quality to trace in first words. We know little of Moses and nothing at all, perhaps, of the actual writer, whoever he was, of the first words of

the Old Testament; and of the first words of what is perhaps the greatest book of the New Testament the authorship is also disputed. They are the same: Moses and St. John, to give the authors their ancient, which may yet prove to be their true, names, both begin with these great words, "In the beginning." And how significant they are in both cases! After its insistence upon morality, which, though its greatest, is not an early, characteristic, the most continuous and striking feature in Hebrew religion is its conception of God as primarily the Creator from Whom everything, heaven and earth, men and the animals, took its rise. It is rooted in the sublime conception of a Divine and personal origin of all things as beginning in an act of God. And so the most poetic mind among the New Testament writers returns to the same thought and gives it a new interpretation. "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth," says the old book. "In the beginning was the Word," and "all things were made by Him"—or rather perhaps "through Him"—says the new. In each the first article of the greatest of creeds is given: without God is no beginning and all beginning is in Him. So far they make the same use of the great words. Then each goes on to make the application which strikes the note of his

own book. "In the beginning God created": for the Old Testament, especially its earlier part, the Divine Being is, before all things, an Invisible Power. "In the beginning was the Word": for the New Testament the Divine Being has before all things become visible in a Person. And these two sublimities of conception are instantly suggested in the very first words of the books which go on to embody and explain them.

The same concentration of a poet into his first words may probably be observed in all literatures. The bulk of what remains to us, after Homer, of the greatest poetry of the Greeks consists of drama; and, as we have seen in Shakespeare, drama does not easily lend itself to this method of great opening phrases carrying in them the suggestion of all that is to follow. But it is plainly to be seen in the work of the only Greek lyric poet of whose work we possess any large portion. Indeed, no one was more likely to use it than Pindar, that master of sublimity, who loves to show his mastery by giving greatness to what in any hands but his could only be truism or commonplace. He often begins his Odes with some large generalization, at once splendid and simple, which is exactly what his own genius was. The very first of the Olympics begins

with the famous ἄριστόν μὲν ὕδωρ—"water is the best of things; and gold," he goes on, "is a flaming fire, and there is no star hotter than the sun." So, again, many of the Odes begin with the gods, the most august of all the common properties of the Greeks and a fit opening for the most religious of their poets: others with gold cups and lyres and other splendid possessions, or even directly with the praise of wealth itself—again no uncharacteristic opening for the most aristocratic and opulent of poets, of whom Landor well said two words, both true, of praise and blame: "Pindar far excels all other poets in disdain of triviality and choice of topics"; and "the words wealth and gold occur too often in the poetry of Pindar."

Of another grave and proud poet, the master of Italy and of the Church, we may note that it is rather for his endings than for his beginnings that he seems to have taken pains to find a significant word. Of him, even more truly than of Milton, Wordsworth might have said, "Thy soul was like a star"; and it is fitting that each of the three parts of his great poem should end with the word "stelle," while the last line of all is that glorious one in which the astronomical interests which play so large a part in the poem are, as it were, laid at the

feet of God, to whose glory its every word is dedicated : " L'amor che muove il sole e l'altre stelle." It is rather strange that the author of the most exactly ordered poem in the world, in which all the parts answer to each other with arithmetical precision, should not have felt that, wherever there are parts, the first is all-important. But so it is. Only one of the three cantos of the *Commedia* has anything striking about its opening words. The *Paradiso* begins with a great line—" la gloria di colui che tutto muove "—which plainly looks on to the line with which it ends. But that is all. Was the proud Dante, who, as he confesses, trembled when he came to the place of pride's purgation, too proud to care to make any bid for attention by an arresting phrase ?

But to turn to England. Of Shakespeare and Milton a word has already been said. Chaucer was too primitive, and too casual an artist to think much of great openings. Of his greatest two poems one begins with a line which might as well be prose and the other with one which, though charming and characteristic, has in it nothing which is either weighty or splendid or in any exceptional way arresting. The last quality that can be looked for in the liquid and diffuse loveliness of Spenser is that of such pregnant concentration as we

are discussing. That being so, it is curious that the poet who owed most to him and most recalls him provides, perhaps, the most famous opening line in modern poetry and the most characteristic of its author. No poem begins with a line which more instantly seizes the attention than the first line of " Endymion " ; and if all poets love beauty none has ever lived so much or written so entirely as Keats in the spirit of " A thing of beauty is a joy for ever." It may well be the finest opening of any English poem as Bacon's " God Almighty first planted a Garden " is the finest opening of any English essay. Wordsworth, who was half a scorner of the artistry of verse, though occasionally and almost unconsciously a great artist himself, has some fine endings : " We feel that we are greater than we know," " To me the meanest flower that blows can give Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears," and the magnificent close of " Yewtrees " :

> in mute repose
> To lie and listen to the mountain flood
> Murmuring from Glaramara's inmost caves.

But of his hundreds of poems very few have any remarkable opening. The greatest are perhaps the first line of the sonnet on Venice, " Once did she hold the gorgeous East in fee " ;

that of the Westminster Sonnet, "Earth has not anything to show more fair," and those arresting words "Loud is the vale," with which the fine stanzas on the death of Fox begin. But these and all the others that could be put with them make a small harvest; and in this detail of first lines, as in his whole attitude, Wordsworth shows himself a man who expects attention as his right and, if it is not freely given, will not go out of his way to seek it. Nor does Byron or Shelley provide much to our purpose. Neither the garrulity of the man of the world nor the diffuseness of the prophet lends itself to art of this sort. Perhaps the only great thing of the kind in Shelley is the fine "I stood within the City disinterred," which is the opening of the glorious first stanza of the Ode to Naples. And with him we may leave the poets. For of those who came after him the one of whom we should expect most in this kind produces nothing. It is strange that so careful and cunning an artist as Tennyson should never have felt the importance of his first lines or first stanzas. But so it seems to have been.

The art of the novelist, so much more diffuse, at once less formal and less imaginative than that of poets and with little of poetry's direct appeal to the ear, obviously

has less use than verse for special efforts of this sort. Yet even in this field there are here and there not uninteresting things to note. Some novelists have used their beginnings with great effect to capture their readers and make them feel assured and happy and at home. No one capable of liking Fielding can have failed to be captured once and for all by the time he had read the introductory chapter to *Tom Jones*. The whole of Fielding—freshness, honesty, humour, common sense, the love of life as men and women really live it—is there ; we at once know him, trust him and are certain we shall enjoy him. There are readers who, having read the book repeatedly, find, each time they go back to it, that, whether the story and its adventures gain or lose, the chapters on things in general with which each book opens provide a pleasure of admiration and sympathy which never fails or diminishes. Such ease, such felicity of phrase, such humanity of outlook, capture us immediately and hold us. Or take an even greater than Fielding, who loved Fielding and learnt of him. Among Scott's greatest two or three creations is certainly the Antiquary. And was there ever a more significant first chapter than that of the novel to which he gave his name? It is Scott in little : an epitome of the man, or at least of

one side of him : not the side of mediaevalism, chivalry and romance, by which, without any intimate understanding of it, he conquered first England and then the world, but that other side, of humour, and humorous understanding of men and women, and especially Scots men and women, and still more especially men and women of the eighteenth century ; with an extra touch of intimacy and liking if they had in them something of that turn for old books and old tales of the country which he always enjoyed and laughed at in himself as well as in others. There is not anywhere in all the Waverley novels, not even in the sayings of old Edie in this, a speech more entirely true and certain than the outburst of wrath with which the Antiquary overwhelms the unlucky Mrs. Macleuchar. No novel has a better beginning, except one, perhaps, which rivals without surpassing it. If the first chapter of *The Antiquary* is the quintessence of one side of Scott, the first chapter of *Pride and Prejudice* is the quintessence of the whole of Jane Austen. That one conversation between Mr. and Mrs. Bennet sets the tune for the book and, except for the tenderness of *Persuasion*, for the best things in all the other books. It is the mind and art of Jane Austen concentrated into a few pages which show, as scarcely any other

equally brief piece of writing shows, what very great art can be made out of a very small subject. How much more art, how much more service to the business in hand, than is to be found in the famous first chapter of *Diana of the Crossways*! That is stuffed full of brilliances which cannot be robbed of their brightness even by their too obvious commonplace-book origin: and it shows in its few pages more intellect, both natural and cultivated, than is to be found in all the chapters of all Jane Austen's books. But of art that has its eye on the object, of art that sets the reader moving on to the story, how little there is in all its laboured and self-conscious cleverness! How inhuman, because overbalanced with intellectualism, it appears when compared with what it aimed, perhaps, at resembling, those large and generous introductions of Fielding!

But to discuss the openings of the most populous of all forms of literature would take us too far. One other, and only one, we will mention: the finest beginning of the greatest of the novelists of the last generation. Like that of Meredith's *Diana*, it is not a first act but an introductory essay; indeed, more abstract even than that, it does not so much as mention a single character of the story which follows. Meredith's chapter deals with wit and

the penalty paid by woman for possessing it; and that is indeed the essence of the book it introduces. The first chapter of *The Return of the Native* describes Egdon Heath: the physical facts of it, its imaginative truth, and the spiritual significance which men of certain moods find in it, especially at certain times. And here, again, is a true introduction. Egdon Heath fills the book; it may be said to be the genius that presides over the action; its visible and ever-present Fate. And there is something else. As in those first chapters of Fielding and Scott and Jane Austen and Meredith, we get in this chapter the author himself; it is a summing up of Hardy, as they are of those others. Meredith gives us his brave independence of mind and art, the subtlety of his brain and the confidence of his faith in what brain could do for himself and the world, the predominantly social nature of his mind and character, and, going with that, the continual desire to shine, and the inevitably resulting affectation. And so this gives us Hardy's brooding loneliness to which, perhaps, Nature was more of a companion than any human being: to which tragedy, the thing coming upon man from an Unknowable Outside, was more akin than comedy, the thing which man, as in Meredith, visibly makes for himself out

of the society of his fellows. That was Hardy all through, and more and more as age increased and, with age, genius. He was one and the same all through. There are sentences here in which we can detect the seeds of *The Dynasts*. Take, for instance, the coming of darkness upon the heath :

> The place became full of a watchful intentness now : for when other things sank brooding to sleep the heath appeared slowly to awake and listen. Every night its Titanic form seemed to await something : but it had waited thus, unmoved, during so many centuries, through the crises of so many things, that it could only be imagined to await one last crisis—the final overthrow.

There is the scene of the book ; and here is its mood, or, if you will, the note of its philosophy :

> The new Vale of Tempe may be a gaunt waste in Thule : human souls may find themselves in closer and closer harmony with external things wearing a sombreness distasteful to our race when it was young. The time seems near, if it has not actually arrived, when the chastened sublimity of a moor, a sea, or a mountain will be all of nature that is absolutely in keeping with the moods of the more thinking among mankind.

Is it a very long journey from such passages as these to *The Ancient Spirit of the Years*, the *Ironic Spirits*, the *Shade of the Earth* and the other *Phantom Intelligences* of *The Dynasts* ?

Hardy is Hardy; and, if it is quite true that Meredith is also Meredith, there is a simplicity, unity and harmony in the one which the other never reached. Hardy is as simply and entirely himself in this wonderful chapter as Jane Austen is in that which begins *Pride and Prejudice*. And it is not only the fact that he was a greater man than Meredith, and setting out to do a greater piece of work, that makes his beginning of *The Return of the Native* a greater thing than that of *Diana*—makes it in truth one of the greatest openings to be found in the whole world of the English novel. It is also its sad but beautiful and restful certainty. Unlike Meredith who is all the while arguing with us and with himself, and even in his argument more concerned to dazzle than to persuade, Hardy seems as he writes to feel himself in the presence, not of readers or critics, but of the universe, and to say, with the quiet assurance of one whose outlook is too large to allow him to talk for victory or care for admiration: "Here is the note of this book and of him who writes it: I give it to you in a few sentences: if you are not moved by them, read no more in this book or in me. For the beginning is the end: they are one and the same, the whole of what I feel, and think, and am."

A VICTORIAN DAME SCHOOL

A Chapter from an Unfinished Volume of Reminiscences

By Arthur Waugh

I

IN the 'seventies of the last century boys were sent to boarding school much earlier than they are to-day; and I was only just eight years old when it was decided that the time had come for me to leave my Somersetshire home.

I suppose no boy ever had much less idea of what going to school meant. I was the eldest, and had no brothers to enlighten me. I had read no school stories. My only glimpses of school-life had been gained from the high seat in my father's dog-cart, while I waited outside the Roman Catholic College at Downside, when he was indoors doctoring sick boys. Sometimes the school were playing cricket on the field opposite. They looked amazingly jolly. There was any amount of noise and

cheerful movement. The monks, too, seemed upon the friendliest terms with their pupils. The smaller boys even thumped them on the back. If school was like that, it could not be such a bad sort of place. So the preparations for my departure from home proceeded without much apprehension upon my part. There was a long black box in the nursery corner, and by its side a little square white play-box with my initials upon it. There were new suits bought at a tailor's (hitherto my mother had made all my clothes). There were even a few precious books from which I could not bear to be parted. . . . These were "the things I was taking to school." . . . But, of course, the things that really counted in my provision were something altogether different. They were not things of a month or two's preparation. They were not flannel vests, nor pocket-handkerchiefs, nor even the instructive stories of R. M. Ballantyne. They were things that nobody thought about at the time, and yet they were the only possessions that have survived.

II

The Roman priest who said, "Give me the first seven years of a child's life, and anyone who likes can have the rest," knew more about

human life than most parents. It is the example, the inspiration, the hygiene of those first seven years that build the character, and make the man. If that is so, then, what was *I* taking to school, to help me to understand others, and make myself understood by them? Not, to begin with, much of a body, for I was a pale, peaky sort of child. I had had no opportunity of fighting the asthma, which attacked me from infancy, with the modern weapon of open-air games. On my seventh birthday an uncle did indeed give me a small Association football, and a little girl came to tea, who helped me to kick it about in "the Meadow," opposite my home. But I remember no other game with it, certainly none with boys of my own age. In the same way, I had acquired a very elementary set of cricket things, with which having loaded the perambulator, I tempted my nurse to turn into a field in the Charlton Road, where I pitched my wickets by hammering them into the hard ground with the face of the bat, thereby ruining that aggressive implement for life with its very first exercise. However, it was no great matter, for with only my old nurse to bowl, the game soon languished and stopped in less than ten minutes. These, so far as I can remember, were my only attempts at "British sport" up

to the beginning of my ninth year. Nowadays, it would be almost impossible for a boy to reach that age, so ignorant of the fascinations of the big and little ball.

Within doors, however, I had fared distinctly better. My mother's morning lessons had given me a good grounding of letters and figures. We all had a passion for drawing, and "making books," which were constructed out of the white paper in which my father's medicine bottles were wrapped. We raided the surgery at all hours in quest of the large sheets, and were never reprimanded for the theft. During my last year at home I had begun Latin with my father, and as the result of many dolorous hours had travelled to the end of the Regular Verbs. I can see that Latin Grammar now, its pages stained with hot buttered toast, for my father heard the lesson while he was waiting for his own breakfast (a sufficiently unfortunate hour !), and I had learnt it, while I was eating mine by the nursery fire, having left the task until the last possible moment, with the usual disastrous result of procrastination. The outlines of the Bible I had by heart ; and *Little Arthur's History* (which at first I imagined had been written expressly for myself), followed by a more strenuous course of Mrs. Markham, had instilled into me a fairly clear notion of

the more picturesque events in the progress of England from the Battle of Hastings to the accession of "Queen Victoria the Good." Of French I knew nothing, but I had read Shakespeare voraciously (without, of course, understanding a quarter of what I read), and we all of us learnt poetry by heart, before we could read,—chiefly Wordsworth, and a little Tennyson. Such, I suppose, was a fairly average start in education for a boy of eight years old, in the middle years of the nineteenth century.

But the great and lasting lesson of our childhood was undoubtedly our sense of discipline; and there, it seems to me, lay the great difference between our generation and its successor. We were bred in obedience, and we believed what we were told. Every day's course, as it ended, had been a step further on the road of discipline; hands folded for grace; chair straight to the table; toys put away in the cupboard; the "walk" at the fixed hour and along the same paths, day after day; the book shut at once, when supper was brought up on a tray; to bed without demur when the clock struck,—day after day, week after week, discipline, discipline, and discipline. . . . "Please, ma'am, Master Arthur's been a naughty boy to-day; he mustn't have no cake for tea." . . . There was no escape from the

law of the nursery; it was just but it was firm. We never questioned it. If we broke it, we knew quite well that we had done wrong, and we were prepared to pay the price. It was the law; it was the first principle of life. And, looking back, I believe now that it was the best of all the possessions that I took to school with me, when I left my father's house on the third of February, 1875, to return indeed many times, but in future always as a guest.

III

The morning of my departure was all bustle and fuss, of which I remember nothing but the figure of Self, the coachman, carrying my box downstairs; a last glimpse of my mother standing by the signal post at the end of the platform, as the train swept round the curve, the glow of my father's cigar in the dark tunnel (for railway carriages were then unlighted by day); and the rattle of the cab-windows, as the musty four-wheeler shook in every joint over the cobble-stones of the Midland Station, Bath. And then we were climbing the hill to Lansdown Crescent, were stopping at the very central house of that wide sweep of eighteenth-century architecture, had passed through the door into the bare hall, were walking up the

winding staircase into Miss Roberts's drawing-room, were standing face to face with the autocrat of the domain herself, and my school-days had begun in earnest. Five minutes later the front door had shut heavily behind my father's retreating back. I was alone in a new world.

The school had reopened after the Christmas holidays several days before; I was a late arrival; and the boys were all out for their midday walk. It was a disadvantage to begin with; if there had been one fellow-sufferer it would have been a help. But Miss Roberts rose kindly from the table where she had been busy over accounts, and did her best to put me at my ease. Then there arose from below the sound of the boys returning, a buzz of voices, broken by short, sharp commands, the like of which I never heard before. A plump and benign-looking matron, addressed as "Fleetwood," appeared at the door, and was told to take me downstairs, where in a large but rather shabby class-room, zinc basins had been put out on the forms, and some thirty boys were washing their hands. The yellow soap was very hard and full of corners: it scratched my hands. There were long roller-towels to dry our fingers on, and when I approached very shyly, and tried to get a corner of one, the boy

who was using it jerked it away, lassoed me with it round the legs and brought me sprawling to the floor. He wore a velvet suit, and had rough, untidy yellowish hair. I thought him the most hateful-looking creature I had ever seen, and little imagined that two terms later Thornton Bullock would be my best friend in the school, destined to play Orson to my Valentine, upon the very spot, as it happened, of this first and most unwarrantable assault. I do not know, indeed, that I thought of anything, except that the world was full of noise, that my dinner refused to get eaten, that every eye in the room was fixing me with a cold contempt, and that it seemed a very, very long time ago that my mother had been waving me "good-bye" upon the station platform.

IV

This school, in which I was to spend the next three years, belonged to a type now, I suppose, entirely obsolete, and so different from the preparatory schools of the present time that a description of its daily routine may, perhaps, be of interest to the younger generation. It was what is known as a "dame-school," run entirely by maiden-ladies; and, for boys between seven and twelve years old, I am inclined to believe that, in spite of all

its possible drawbacks, it was as good and as wise an institution as any that could be contrived by the wit of man. In many respects, indeed, it was better, for very few men understand boys of such tender years, or can manage them as tactfully as women do.

The headmistress, Miss Roberts, was an orphan, and had inherited the school from her mother, who had " run it " with great success for a number of years. Lansdown Crescent stands in one of the very best situations in Bath, perched upon the height, just below the country lanes of Lansdown and Charlcombe, and looking straight across the valley, in which Bath lies along the winding course of the River Avon. Number Ten, in which our school resided, is a fine example of Wood's eighteenth-century architecture, with large, high, airy rooms, opening one out of the other on each of the three spacious floors. When it was well furnished, it must have made a most comfortable home ; but, of course, as a school, it was somewhat of a barren wilderness. The classrooms of the present-day " prep " are carpeted with thick linoleum ; the walls are hung with pictures of ancient Greece and Rome, or with photographs of School cricket and football teams. But we knew no such incentive to the imagination. A couple of maps, usually slung

askew, and a coloured picture of emigrants boarding a ship, mounted on cardboard, from some Christmas Annual, with a nasty, sallow-looking cane suspended from the same nail, were the only adornments of the front class-room, where most of the work was done. In the back room, which looked upon the rather rusty garden, I remember no decoration of any kind. The drawing-room on the first floor was Miss Roberts's principal abode: the back drawing-room had been converted into a dormitory, and there were four other dormitories above. The headmistress slept in a tiny little room, close to the principal dormitories, and if there was the sound of a boy out of his bed, when once the lights had been put out, she would appear mysteriously in the midst of the dark room, seize him by his flying night-gown (this was long before the advent of pyjamas), pin him across her knee on the nearest bed, and pulling off her left slipper, belabour him to no small advantage, until he squealed for pity. I do not think she really hurt very much, however. I am sure she did not wish to. But discipline had to be observed, and the " naughty little boy " well frightened.

And we certainly were well frightened of her, although every one of us loved her. She must have been quite a young woman in those days,

though to us, of course, she seemed already old. She was tall, upright, vigorous, a superb disciplinarian. But under her apparent sternness there lurked a most lively sense of humour. Her eye was always twinkling with fun. And, when, on Sunday evenings, she gathered us all round her in the drawing-room, some sitting on chairs and some upon the floor, and read aloud to us, with an abundant vivacity, some simple serial story from *Chatterbox* or *The Sunday at Home*, which generally lasted the whole term, we felt something of the home spirit return to our hearts and memories. Two years after I left the school she married the father of one of my contemporaries there, and he and his sisters had abundant reason to know that the traditional view of a stepmother may be most beneficently belied, where sympathy and care flow out to another woman's children through the channels of pure unselfishness and devotion.

She was assisted in the teaching and routine by a little lady named Miss Ellen Barnes, who was even then a fragile survival from another age than ours. If we thought her exceedingly old-fashioned, I wonder what she would seem like to our children. She was very small, and very dainty. She wore curly black ringlets on either side of her face, and a broad black ribbon

in her hair. In the winter her hands were protected by lace mittens. Very animated, with bright bird-like eyes, she directed her class-work by means of a short peeled wand, which she called "a pointer." With this she indicated the figures on the blackboard, and with it also she rapped vehemently on the desk, if any boy's attention was seen to be wandering. Sometimes she rapped so sharply that "the pointer" broke to pieces in her hand, and then, when next we were walking in the country, her pet boy for the moment was commissioned to cut a new twig from the hedge, and peel it as white as her neat little collar and cuffs. She was a great stickler for precise forms of speech, and rebuked slang with emphasis. I believe I was always a little in love with her, and, when I was chosen to walk with her, when we started out in a crocodile, I was made happy for the rest of the day.

These two chief mistresses ruled throughout the whole of my school days, but there were others who came and went, some, no doubt, for reasons which we little imagined. Two, in particular, recur to memory, two whose sojourn among us was very brief. One was a tall, gaunt female of forbidding aspect, who spent her first evening in telling the most harrowing ghost stories to a circle of wide-eyed, eagerly

interested children, who were afterwards unable to get to sleep. I believe she left on the third day. The other was a very pretty little girl, not much (I fancy) over twenty, who encouraged the more attractive boys to sit very close to her, and sometimes stroked their hair. We were all broken-hearted when she left; but I doubt not that the decision was wise. Discipline and sentiment are best preserved in separate compartments.

V

The daily routine was healthy, but monotonous. Visions come back to me of early rising on chilly mornings, with a grey mist over Lansdown Hill, cold water to wash in, and lonely-looking lights flickering in the villa windows beyond the garden. As soon as we were dressed, each dormitory stood in a row, to be inspected by Miss Barnes. "Show your nails: now your thumbs: have you cleaned your teeth?" each boy was asked in turn. Then "right turn," and we marched, room after room, down into the basement for breakfast. Lessons all the morning till twelve, then a walk or games till dinner; in the summer, I fancy, we went out again later in the afternoon, but there was a long afternoon's work, and preparation again after tea. Our instruc-

tresses did their duty by us. We were learning all the time.

There were certain recurrent duties which broke the monotony of the routine. One day in the week, a pleasant, grey-haired Sergeant visited the school, and put us through the elements of military drill. It was not exciting, and the only part we enjoyed came at the end of the hour, when he pulled a flute from his pocket, fitted it together, and played "The Campbells are Coming," while we all stamped round and round the schoolroom. Then, again, in the winter, there was a weekly dancing-lesson, to which I was not admitted, as my father (a great dancer himself, by the by) considered it "effeminate." I do not know whether it was effeminate, but it was certainly very silly. Years afterwards I found precisely the same thing described with accuracy and humour in Mr. F. Anstey's *Vice Versa*—"'Ands laying lightly on the 'ips, if you please, the left foot sliding gracefully, with the toe well pointed." . . . I see Thornton Bullock's attempt now to slide gracefully. Gilbert's Gondoliers, compared with him, were masters of the pose. . . . And then on Thursdays, every week throughout the year, came Bath Night. There were three tubs of hot water in the basement kitchen, continually

refilled from steaming cans upon the range, and in batches of three from the youngest to the oldest, we were thoroughly washed before the fire by the female servants of the household! Soap-suds flew in all directions, towels flicked in every eye, and by the kitchen dresser Miss Roberts stood with a pair of nail-scissors and snipped every boy's toe-nails in turn. The crowning jest of the evening was to attire ourselves in our discarded clothes and soaking towels, in some sort of turbanned travesty of the pictures in the *Arabian Nights*, and so to announce ourselves at the dormitory doors, as we returned to bed. "Arthur, Duke of Bretagne" . . . "Almanazar, Caliph of Bagdad," and so forth. This escape into the realms of imagination was indulgently countenanced by the authorities, until one boy, more ingenious than the rest, constructed two dummy figures out of his wardrobe, stuck them up against the wash-stand, and exclaiming, "Behold your Gods, O Israel," proceeded to commit idolatry with his head bowed to the floor. Unfortunately Miss Roberts had followed him upstairs, and catching him at a physical disadvantage, got in three very sporting shots with her slipper. From that day forward dressing-up on bath-nights was forbidden.

These were diversions, however; for the rest,

we were there to learn, and we had to learn. The work was regular and conscientious, and sometimes the lessons seemed difficult, but our governesses never shirked the business of explanation. Indeed, I am convinced that, until a boy is, say, eleven years old, he learns much better from a woman. A woman has more patience ; she understands the difficulties better. The top classical form at Lansdown Crescent was taught by a visiting master, and I was under him for nearly two years. He was a scholar of no mean acquirements, and I am sure he taught us well. But we were afraid of him, and our fear often paralysed our memory. He had a large ruby signet-ring with which he used to rap us on the top of the head. He had also a flashing eye, which, I believe, we feared more than the ring. Our minds were never at peace enough to learn. So many teachers mistake tyranny for instruction.

Every Saturday evening the whole school sat round and sang. Those of us who had no kind of voices, of whom I myself was conspicuously one of the worst specimens, were called " the Grunting Form," and sat as far away as possible from Miss Barnes, who presided over a harmonium, and taught the musical such simple ballads as " The Hardy

Norseman," "Doodah Day," "Wait for the Wagon," and the religious melodies of Mr. Ira D. Sankey. Then prayer-books were got out, and in deadly silence, we all sat round and learnt the Gospel for the next day. It was a splendid exercise for the memory, and I am sure there must be several survivors of the discipline who, like myself, owe to that rather dreary hour a faithful memory for the text of the New Testament. Next morning, before going to church, we repeated the lesson aloud, and if we had forgotten it, we were suitably punished.

The scale of punishments was simple. For a small offence a boy had to stand before the mistress for a quarter or a half an hour in his spare time, with his hands held stiffly to his sides. For a worse offence he was caned on the hands; for a very bad one on the back. If the whole school had been involved in some disturbance, we underwent an ordeal which, I believe, must have been a patent of Miss Roberts's own invention. We had what was called "A General Sit." In one corner of the schoolroom, there was a very high chair, with a seat about 4 feet or 4 feet 6 inches from the ground. This chair was drawn up to the centre table in the schoolroom, and Miss Roberts ascended into it, and sat enthroned with her

feet upon the table. The whole school were ranged round on forms, hands folded in the lap. Not a movement was allowed. "Graham Barlow, you are twitching your thumbs." . . . "Willie Vincent, how dare you scratch your head." . . . The torture was real, for the strangest itches began to attack one in the least expected places. This might last for twenty minutes, and it was a very palpable punishment. No doubt, it was better than spoiling a boy's handwriting with impositions, and it was wonderful discipline in self-restraint.

VI

Punishments, however, were for week days: on Sunday the time was given up to religious exercises. . . . If only one could speak more happily of those hours, for they were inspired, I am sure, by the most fervent sincerity! But Sunday at school was unquestionably the worst day of the week. We attended two churches, for morning and afternoon service respectively. Both were exceedingly Evangelical, and in neither was there the least appeal to a childish imagination. At All Saints, where we generally went in the afternoon, we were personal friends with the parson, who used to come and give us Scripture lessons on Mondays, and would stop and talk to us, if he met us out for

a walk. He had a lovely old garden at Chalcombe, and was an authority on pocket-knives and chestnut-fighting. He had a round, clean-shaved, kindly face, and we knew him for a good fellow. But his services were very uninspiring, and the church, being a square building with circular galleries, always made me think of a theatre, and plan out a stage with the vestry as a scene-dock. The church we attended in the morning was even less encouraging. I visited St. Stephen's, Lansdown, about twenty years ago, but found it all changed. The only feature I could remember was a certain pillar, with a highly decorated capital, which stood immediately opposite the school pew. The rest of the fabric was metamorphosed, and almost beautiful. But in our time St. Stephen's was a whitewashed barn of peculiar melancholy. Over the chancel arch were large galvanized metal letters: "O worship the King in the beauty of holiness." Every Sunday that text seemed to me a mocking irony. There might be holiness, but beauty there was certainly not. The incumbent was a very earnest man, much admired (I believe) by the other sex. He had delicately chiselled features, wore curly whiskers, and preached in a black gown and bands. His sermons were very long, but they were the most interesting

part of the service, in the general course of which many of the devout preferred to say their prayers standing up, with their top-hats held in front of their noses. In the season of Advent the sermons became especially fulminating. All the prophecies of Scripture were fulfilled. The Lord's coming was at hand : it might even be that week ; it was more than probable it would be that very night. The preacher had a genuine eloquence : he waved his big black sleeves ; his eyes took fire. No wonder we children were frightened. Once more, when we were alone in our beds, a haunting night-horror came down upon me, grim and devastating. Over and over again I crept in my nightgown to the windows, and stared out over the sleeping lamp-lit city of Bath to the Mendip Hills beyond, tremulously expecting every moment to see the heavens opened, and the chariots of fire descending upon the Abbey Tower.

Did that sort of preaching ever do any good to anyone ? I do not know. But I know that it did much harm to many children, filling their dreams with terror, and corrupting the gospel of Love into a whirlpool of weird vengeance. The company of other boys, and the healthy tiredness at the end of a busy day, had almost banished my phantoms of the night-nursery at

home. Now they returned, backed by the authority of the faith. We must believe these things. We went to church in order to believe them. And Miss Roberts clearly believed them, or she would have told us to the contrary. . . . I wonder. . . . Perhaps, if grown-up people fifty years ago had been a little franker with the young upon these far-reaching and devastating problems of faith and hope, the churches would not be so empty as many of them are to-day!

VII

But what of our amusements, our entertainments, our games? Well: here is fixed the widest gulf that separates our system from the preparatory school of to-day. The modern "prep" is simply a public school in embryo. The games are as much a matter of discipline as the work. They are organized by the masters; the school colours given for them are matters of supreme importance; the teams travel about to other schools, and their expenses figure conspicuously in the school-bills; the annual Paters' Match in the summer is a centre of anxiety as much to the parent as the child. Each is afraid of making a fool of himself before the other.

But we knew none of these feverish excite-

ments, for we had no organized games at all. Just below St. Stephen's Church on the hill there was a small triangular piece of ground, now built over with a pair of "villa residences," which was our own exclusive playing field. It might have been a quarter of an acre in extent, and it contained a swing and a giant stride. Here in summer we played a sort of desultory single-wicket game, in which I can remember no one showing much prowess. There was one summer, when the game was galvanized into some sort of life by the presence of a new boy named Lord Athlumney, who possessed a very shining bat in a green baize case, and hit the ball into the road several times, which was accounted no small feat. But he only stayed a term or two, and then went on to Harrow, where in due course his name appeared in the XI at Lord's,—the only cricketer, I believe, that Lansdown Crescent ever produced. In the winter we took a football down into the Victoria Park, and kicked it about between goals constructed of heaps of great-coats. We did not "change" for this sport, but played in our usual clothes, black felt hats and all. The rules were a mixture of Eton Game, Rugby, and Association, each boy contributing some piece of lore gathered from his father's conversation, so that the score

consisted of goals, tries, rouges, and bad calx —a confusion which not one of us could have explained, but which we all believed in, as part of the faith of Lansdown Crescent, handed down from our predecessors.

Neither did we know anything of the sport that went on outside, of public school and 'Varsity records. The modern "prep" boy is great upon "averages": I am confident that not one of us had ever heard of such a thing. The only sporting event in the year for us was the Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race. Then, indeed, we all went mad with excitement, and the whole city of Bath seemed to join in the revelry. We were allowed to walk down to Milsom Street, where the ladies' shops—King's and Jolly's—were all decked out with dark and light blue dresses, sunshades and bonnets, and where every shopkeeper posted the result in his window, as soon as it came through by telegraph. Then the Oxford boys punched the Cambridge, and the winners cried "Sucks for you!" and the losers growled "Wait till next year." And there was one sad occasion, when almost all the school was down with measles, and Miss Roberts, appreciating the importance of the news, sent one healthy survivor down into town to bring back the result of the race. He returned in a jaded condition. "It puts

up 'Dead Heat,'" he said: "I don't know what it means!"

"'Dead Heat,'" we echoed. "What's a Dead Heat?"

And once more Miss Roberts came to the rescue. "I am not sure," she said: "but I think it means they were both equal." So that day the punches and the "scores" were fairly divided.

VIII

Yes, indeed: our athletics were a very modest affair, but in amusements which made an appeal to the imagination we could, I fancy, hold our own with anybody. And our particular triumph was the game of Yorks and Lancasters. We had been reading the Wars of the Roses that term, and the adventurous period inflamed our fancy. So, certain ringleaders got whispering together; and, when our winding "crocodile" had proceeded to the edge of the Charlcombe lanes, where we were allowed to "break ranks," we asked permission to start a new game, which was designed, as Dr. Grimstone might have said, "to reproduce the mimic warfare of our studies." We were divided into two bands, and before the game was played a second time, we had got our governesses to make us red and white rosettes

to wear in our caps. Furnished with long sticks from the hedge, we planned surprises, laid ambuscades, enfiladed our enemy in the hedge-rows, and imagined ourselves the very pink of chivalry. I was appointed Chronicler to the Yorkists, and the chronicle still survives, written in large hand in a school exercise book. It is extremely babyish for boys of eleven years old, but at any rate it shows how fresh and happy the childish imagination can be kept, if only it is preserved from the false professionalism of a sport that is little less than a burden. "The Battle of the Spring," which raged round a wayside horse-trough on Lansdown, must have seemed to a passer-by to resemble nothing but a few knicker-bockered children waving hazel sticks above their heads. But to us it was a gorgeous onslaught of knights in shining armour, and the dirty pocket handkerchief which fluttered above the spring was decked, in our fancy, with all the studded heraldry of the House of York. It was in those days that four of us Yorkists, lighting in the Latin Grammar upon the immortal line, "Dulces moriens reminiscitur Argos"—"Dying he remembers sweet Argos"—chose it for the motto of our comradeship, and illumined it in all our books. We went into battle with that cry upon our lips, and such was the force of

imagination, that I verily believe we closed hand to hand with the accursed Lancasters, endowed with the burning conviction that nothing but death could satisfy our rage. Nowadays we teach our children sturdier sports than these; but, in the service of them, do we not perhaps sacrifice the interpreting gift of fancy, which still has power to transform a back-kitchen into a palace hall?

IX

This fostering of the imagination on the field found another outlet in the winter months. It drove us to theatricals. For myself, I had always been a creature of the theatre, although here again my joys were chiefly imagined. At this time I had seen three Shakespearean plays at Downside College, and a couple of pantomimes at Bristol; but I may be said to have grown up from the cradle in the world of acting and make-believe. Our father had been a great playgoer, and an admirable amateur actor, and the first things he taught us as children were snatches of old Robson burlesques, stray memories of Miss Bateman as "Leah," and Fechter in *The Duke's Motto*, together with plentiful scenes from Shakespeare, in which he seemed equally good as Shylock, Falstaff, Hotspur, Othello, and even

Hamlet. So, when the business of pretending began to grow upon the school, we asked Miss Roberts's leave to put a play in rehearsal, obtained it, and all wrote home at once, demanding a wardrobe, in which to dress up. My own parcel of cardboard armour, silk sashes, capes, and caps was the largest of all, and I hope it is not sentimental to remember with tenderness that my eldest sister, then aged seven, hearing that I was to act Robin Hood, broke open her money-box to buy hunting horns for me and my merry men, and wept incontinently in the village shop, when she found that only tin penny-trumpets were to be obtained at anything like the sum available!

The Babes in the Wood, *Valentine and Orson*, *Dick Whittington*, such were the productions of my first management, extending over two "seasons," with myself as Robin Hood, Valentine, and the happy owner of the fortune-making cat. We made a stage of forms, and the programmes were great works of art. As for the acting, I have no idea how bad it may have been: but Miss Roberts, in the generosity of her spirit, pretended to take it quite seriously. She asked a number of her friends, and the servants were encouraged to ask theirs; and the dear old parson, who knew so much about pocket-knives, came and sat in the front row,

and applauded every entrance and exit. And we were all very happy, as amateurs generally are; and did not quarrel over the choice of parts, as amateurs commonly do; and of all my "prep" school recollections those are the happiest, not altogether, I hope, because I myself filled the centre of the stage. And yet, if I put myself into the confessional, I suppose that that must have had a good deal to do with it, after all.

* * * * *

Two years ago, in an autumn of much sorrow, I went back to the West country, and to my old home. The shadow of separation and change lay over everything. The well-loved trees that used to shut in the house were gone; the wooded lanes, where we played at Robin Hood, were sliced back like railway cuttings to make way for motor-cars; the hillside had broken out into a rose-rash of bungalows. I drove into Bath. That immemorial city, too, was changed. The traffic was all in a block between Wood's stately mansions; even Quiet Street re-echoed with noise. I asked the driver to take me up the hill, and left the car at the foot of Lansdown Place. Suddenly, miraculously, here was something that had *not* changed. In that world that seemed always afternoon, it was afternoon still. A lonely

errand-boy shuffled along the Crescent, passed, and was gone. I stood opposite the door of my old school, and gazed hungrily at the windows. The ugly wire-blinds had vanished, and there was a glimpse of rich curtains and mirrors beyond, on the walls of what used to be the Front Schoolroom. Otherwise, not a stone looked a day older.

Suddenly the door opened, and a man of early middle age stepped out, looked around him briskly, and hurried across in my direction. He was clearly the present owner of the house. Should I speak to him? Should I ask him whether I might look just for one last time, through the doorway, and see the room where we endured our General Sits, the fireplace by which the cane used to hang, the box-room where we dressed up for *Valentine and Orson*? The moment's hesitation lost the chance. The present owner was already out of hail. I turned and took my solitary way towards Sion Hill. "Better so," as the sentimental songs of our youth protested; very much better so. My old Victorian Dame School had long since become a thing of the past. "It was a place of ghosts, and I was ghostlier than all."

DAME'S SCHOOL

By Ivor Brown

WHENEVER educational conference is in flood, I seek in vain, amid all this congressional energy, a Rally of Dames. There are, of course, many species of dame. To most of us the phrase means simply Mesdames Twankey, Crusoe, et sœurs, and I have never forgotten the Dame's School of an early pantomime in which the mother of Red Riding Hood was mistress of extremely violent scholastic ceremonies and Simple Simon was in stripes often. To others the word dame is an honorific title which vaguely suggests the more censorious branches of "uplift." But the word is also applied to those women who undertake the first stages of a boy's education. In that sense the word is dear to me. For between the ages of six and nine I attended a Dame's School, and I think that I was better taught there than at any subsequent time in my sixteen years of existence in statu pup., as the Latinists so aptly call it.

What I chiefly remember about that Dame's School was an absence of nonsense. You were set to do lessons and you did lessons. There was no harshness; we were as far from Mrs. Squeers as from Mme Montessori. But there was none of the modern fudge about Work being a Pleasure and lessons a Grand Joke. My school, for example, existed before the Plasticene Age, in which the up-to-date child now stickily flounders, with the result that he is scarce able to read until his years have reached double figures. Amo, amas, amat was no other than itself. We did not, after mastering its conjugation, waste time in stopping to model a pair of lovers in putty. "Jography" was "jography," i.e. about maps, and history was history, i.e. about chaps, and there was no need for the growing boy to express himself, as they say now, by drawing little pictures of Julius Cæsar or being vaguely plastic about Spain. The strongest thing in my memory is that few of the pupils in the Dame's School resented the application to lessons. Children, as a rule, have no hatred of drudgery and sometimes even enjoy learning things by heart. (How, by the way, did that astonishing phrase come into our language? Learning by heart sounds so affectionate, and perhaps it really represents an educational fact.) Children are

realists and rationalists, and if you tell them what a thing is about and add that it has to be learned they will learn it without much ado.

The only painful memories I have of my Dame's School are of dancing lessons and of being compelled to listen to *Alice in Wonderland* read aloud. The latter I particularly detested. It was so far less intelligible than Latin grammar, whose acquaintance I made at the now unfashionable age of seven. Grammar, after all, had some rules and sense. *Alice* is essentially an adult's book, its fantastic humour and exquisite nonsense being far over the heads of six and seven. Its manuscripts are now properly scrambled for by elderly American millionaires. No child who hadn't been coached to do so by its parents would sacrifice a Saturday penny for the book ; in later life he might give a month's salary.

My memories are of a business-like institution where I was firmly and kindly propelled up a ladder of scheduled information by young women who did not have university degrees, were utterly untainted by educational theory, and simply did their job of pushing certain facts into the childish noddle. It bore no sort of resemblance to the dreadful Dame's School of *Quality Street*, with its nasty little masochist crying, " I love you, Miss Phœbe," and demand-

ing to be caned till he bled by the hand that he adored. We were not so precocious. Nor were there any pathetic antics of ringleted spinsters designed to melt the hearts of the upper circle. The business was conducted efficiently, peaceably, and punctually, without fuss and without any hocus-pocus of the last-minute psychology.

I suppose that my Dame's School has vanished long ago. It has probably been replaced by an Infant's Self-expression Institute, which advertises itself in the advanced weeklies and announces that it will train boys and girls of six for service in a self-governing community by developing their moral and emotional rhythm. The children, who must not be pushed or hurried, will go on playing with bricks in the most eurhythmic fashion until they are twelve, and will possibly begin to face the alphabet at thirteen. Having been carefully taught to regard Work as Play, they will then, or later, receive a nasty shock on discovering that Work is nothing of the kind, that jobs have got to be done, and that the chief delight of life is knowing that they are properly done and won't have to be done over again. It is surely mere cruelty to children to encourage them in the faith that there is joy in labour. There are various ways of being interested in

the goal of one's work, and there is obviously ample satisfaction in completion of labour. I once asked a racing oarsman whether he got any pleasure from a form of sedentary and agonizing toil deemed by the ancients to be fit only for slaves. He said that the actual training and the rowing of a race were hellish, but that it was good to look back upon the ardours and achievements of the teamwork at the end of the torture. And that is the right attitude to take up to most forms of effort. It is nice to have it behind one; possibly it is even nice to contemplate the results in credit or in cash. But children who are taught to muddle up Work with Fun are simply being nurtured for a series of gigantic sufferings and disenchantments when they are at last moved on from Montessori to mathematics and from the school to the office or the workshop.

The idea that we must always find pleasure in labour is one of the most dangerous sentimentalities of an age that believes itself to be unsentimental. It is not, of course, true that work is necessarily unpleasant, but it is true that everybody's working life, be he king or curate or coal-heaver, is largely made out of routine performances or feats of drudgery which are in themselves unpleasant but which can be redeemed from odium if they are

regarded as contributions to a total effect of work and achievement that is worth while.

The fatal fallacy is to shield children from steady work; the less developed are one's reason and imagination the less one resents discipline, which suggests that it is only humane and charitable to break children to it young. There is a familiar fallacy of those who have been given enough philosophy to make themselves miserable and enough leisure to brood and bicker and write books. They always write about any clerkly or small suburban home as if it were the general headquarters of despair, whereas Mr. Zero, whose agonies are the eternal theme of expressionist plays, is probably a dozen times as happy as the author who breaks out into furious commiseration with the poor man's lot. Mr. Zero takes his work as it comes, does not fret, and gets home in time to spend an evening or a week-end as he chooses. This Mr. Zero may be a prosperous barrister just as much as a junior clerk; the greater part of professional work is quite as dull as machine-minding, and the compensations lie outside the details of the drudgery—i.e. in the reward, the environment, and the general sense of having done a necessary job in a competent way.

That is why I feel nervous for the coming

generation when I read of the remarks made by the more exalted educationists in conference. Still more do I tremble when I read the statements of the new-style Dame's School with a jargon as pretentious as its fees are high. I am grateful to my own quite uneurhythmical schoolmistresses for getting me well into Latin before I was nine and never encouraging me to fiddle about with plasticene. Their strict application to business saved me much trouble later on, and gave me no false hopes about the ecstasy of the sweating brow and labouring hand. By permitting me to understand that work was work, they showed themselves good teachers in Dame Nature's academy of fact. And I, for my part, ask no more of dominie or dame, a reactionary view, I believe, but realistic, and one that seems to need restatement in this romantic age of plasticene and play-way.

THE ANCIENTS AND THE MODERNS

By E. E. Kellett

NOTHING shows the artful cunning of the old poets and historians more clearly than their reticence as to numbers, times, and distances. The modern craze for scientific precision, lauded as it is by statistical pedants, has all but ruined romance. The shipwreck in *Don Juan* loses in glamour what it gains in accuracy when we read that

> Nine in the cutter, thirty in the boat,
> Were counted in them when they got afloat.

Homer never makes such a mistake. He does not measure the biceps or the calf of Polyphemus as the reporters measure those of Carnera ; nor does he weigh the rocks which the heroes hurled at each other on the plain of windy Troy. All he says is that they were bigger than two of his own contemporaries could raise ; but even as to the strength of his contemporaries he is silent, so that we are left without the means even of guessing. As to

distances and times he is still vaguer. I would hazard the assertion that in all his poems there is no mention of a fifth of a second or of a fraction of an inch. Pindar is like him. What use, to a devotee of "records," are all Pindar's eulogies of Olympian, Pythian, or Nemean victors? Historians are equally indifferent. Elijah, we know, girded up his loins and ran all the way from somewhere or other to the entrance of Jezreel, keeping neatly in front of Ahab's chariot; but the speed of the chariot, like the starting-point, is left unrecorded. Of Pheidippides we learn only that he reached Sparta at *some time* on the second day after leaving Athens; and so careless is the narrator that he gives no hint as to how much we are to deduct for the interview with the god Pan which took place about half-way. Even in Christian days there is similar laxity. Bernal Diaz exhausts his vocabulary in his admiration of the mighty leap by which Alvarado saved himself from the Aztecs. It is a pity, remarks Prescott (doubtless proleptically jealous for the fame of some American Rhodes scholar), that Bernal forgot to tell us the precise width of the jump. So it was always, till the pettifogging nineteenth century of our era introduced the prosaic stop-watch and tape-measure.

This vagueness, however distressing to the

statistician, has none the less two very distinct advantages. It tends to qualify the arrogance of modern athletes, for whatever their prowess they can never be sure it attains to that of some Trojan or Arthurian paladin. The long-jumper at the Oxford and Cambridge sports may "beat the record," but he may still lag far behind Alvarado; and I retain the right of telling the most Herculean weight-putter that he has yet to surpass the feats of Odysseus. On the other hand, it saves the self-respect of those who, like the present writer, have no athletic distinction to boast of; for it allows them to imagine that, had they been born a thousand or so years since, they might have rivalled Ajax or Cœur-de-Lion. So long as I do not know in exact foot-pounds the strength of a Robert Bruce, I am at liberty to believe that my own, though meagre in comparison with that of Sandow, may exceed the might so verbosely but indistinctly panegyrized by Barbour. Not without a certain degree of self-satisfaction, I propose to show that this is no mere baseless conjecture, like that in which Sir Thomas Browne indulged as to the song of the Sirens. Unintentionally, doubtless, Homer has now and then left indications on which more or less exact statements may be based; and, by comparing these indications with the definite

knowledge I possess as to my own powers, I undertake to make it probable that nothing but the accident of place and date has prevented me from figuring as the chief hero of the *Iliad*. I shall show, in the next few paragraphs, that however brightly a man might shine among the warriors of Troy, he would have made but a poor show had I been there. I shall prove it by choosing as my rival no mere Hector or Diomedes: I shall touch no puny shield. I challenge the very pride and paragon of the Achæan host, the godlike Achilles himself. And I challenge him not on a moral ground, though my command over my temper is vastly more certain than his. I take him on the chief of his physical perfections—that speed of foot which his biographer is never tired, in season and out of season, of calling to our notice.

We read, towards the end of the twenty-first Book of the *Iliad*, that, at the crisis of the Trojan rout, Apollo, assuming the form of Agenor, drew Achilles away from the main seat of the battle to the Scamander. Unfortunately, in his usual slack fashion, Homer does not fix the point with the precision we should desire; and geologists inform us that during the ages the river has changed its course. We may, however, confidently assume that the distance

from Troy was not more than eight or ten stades, or a little over a mile, at the utmost. No sooner has Achilles discovered his mistake than he flings a few indignantly derisive words at the god, and rushes like a prize race-horse toward the city, swallowing the ground in fierceness and rage. The respite has saved many lives. The weary and panting Trojans are now all safe within the impregnable walls, save Hector, whom his evil star persuades to await the enemy by the Scæan gate.

The first to descry him is old Priam, who may, like Moses, have retained his eye undimmed; and the flash of Achilles' armour may have carried far, though, as the sun was probably behind him, this is unlikely. In any case, we can hardly allow a range of more than half a mile. The old man surveys the oncoming portent long enough to compare it with Orion, which brings pestilence to mortals, and to beat his head in foreboding terror—a process which must have taken some seconds at least. But this is not all. There is still ample time for a speech of thirty-nine hexameter lines, or roughly three hundred words. This would occupy an English orator—the cheers being omitted—for about two minutes; but it is, I believe, the opinion of philologers that the Greeks spoke their quantitative and inflected

language far more slowly than we do ours. I should be justified therefore in assigning another minute to this discourse; but, to be strictly fair, I will treat Priam as a British speaker, and give him the mere hundred and twenty seconds. By the time he has finished, a modern donkey-cart would assuredly have reached the gate: but I will assume that Achilles is now a furlong or two away, a distance which a fast runner of to-day can cover in fifty seconds. Let us see how these fifty seconds are filled.

Priam tears some of his hoary hairs from his head. Hecuba weeps, and, in a voice we may imagine to be broken by sobs, utters a speech of eight lines or sixty words: half a minute. Hector, who still awaits Achilles as he rushes on with giant strides and irresistible fury, refuses to obey his parents, though apparently there is still time to open the gate and let him through. Ever shorter grows the respite, ever nearer draws the doom. Hector has to decide in haste: delay was never more dangerous than now. He has no time even for an ordinary Homeric speech, though it be but a speech to his great-souled heart. He therefore contracts it into thirty-two lines, which, on a conservative estimate, need not have occupied more than a minute and a half. By the end of it we learn

that the swift-footed Achilles, like the helmeted warrior-god Enyalios, is—upon him? No, near him: *how* near, unluckily we can but guess. As he does not hurl his spear, the space is probably at least fifteen yards: there is still a minute.

I have purposely reduced the times to a minimum; but few will deny, on reading the passage, that the impression conveyed is one of far more than the five minutes of my computation. The distant descrying, the distracted frenzy, the speeches, seem to demand at lowest a quarter of an hour; and it is probable that much more than a quarter of an hour would be taken by a rhapsode in his recital. It must not be forgotten, also, that a speech is rarely, if ever, as long in the report as in actuality: it is tolerably certain that Homer has greatly abridged all three orations. But give Achilles the benefit of the doubt. The race is half a mile at most, and the time five or six minutes. I maintain that, at the age of Achilles, I could have given him fifty yards and a beating.

It is likely that, when Hector took to flight, Achilles, having now a pace-maker, somewhat increased his speed. But even so, it would to-day prove a sad want of training were an athlete, after covering leisurely half a mile, to

be put out of breath by the slight extra exertion of trotting three times round so small a circle as that of Hissarlik. Homer, however, tells us that Athene, seeing his blown condition, bade him stand still for a while and recover his breath. I do not think that in my twenties I should have been thus troubled. Even Hamlet might have contrived to hold out at so slight an expenditure of exertion.

I do not forget that Achilles is in armour, and that he comes brandishing a fairly ponderous spear. But we have to remember that the armour was divine, and it would be an insult to Hephaistos to imagine that he could not make it light though impenetrable, and well-fitting though there is no record of his taking Achilles' measurements. It is certain that the armour left the hero plenty of freedom to "ply his knees and feet," and the whole tone of the poet implies that it was little hindrance to ease of bodily movement. I believe that, with a few weeks' practice in proving a suit of Homeric armour, I too could "assay to go" in it, and should be able to attain a very respectable speed. As for the Pelian ash, Homer always speaks as if Achilles could wield it like a walking-stick. I have not heard that, in relay races, the baton is a serious impediment.

Making full allowance, then, for every excuse that can be urged in favour of my rival, I take it that my case is fully demonstrated. The fastest man in the Greek army took five or six minutes, and probably much more, over less than half a mile. During my schooldays I repeatedly *walked* the distance in a shorter time, in ordinary dress, on the open road, and burdened with a stick. I passed several rustic Priams during the performance, but none of them, however keen their admiration, ever compared me with Orion or Enyalios.

MILLENARY THRUSHES

By Sir W. Beach Thomas, K.B.E.

WE shall all guess the approach of the millennium by different signs, according to our various tastes and interests, as Charles Lamb prophesied it for the date when antiquated virginity should be spoken of without a scoff. Personally I shall be a millenarian when a March blackbird shall sit securely on five eggs in a nest built for all to see in an open hedge by the school playing field. Every March the thrushes and blackbirds set their solid nests where they are hardly less conspicuous than the rooks' nest in the elms, or the magpies' in the " bullfinch " hedges ; and much more vulnerable. Every year these nests are harried ; and the birds go on building others till the opening leaves force on them the secrecy, sought and found by most birds at the outset, but utterly scorned by the tribe of thrush. This spring, and before it, they seem to have even exceeded their normal optimism ; every single nest that I found was robbed later.

This unwarranted confidence is a phenomenon that becomes more curious the more you look into it. You would say that the birds ride for a fall by instinct and volition, both. The nests are exposed not to one but to all dangers. They are so visible that you see them from a car travelling at a high speed. They are placed fairly near the ground (I have found both thrush and blackbird *on* the ground) and rest on supports solid enough to act as ladder for any rat or weasel. They are as open as a dandelion flower to the shrapnel of rain, hail and sleet, and cannot be closed, like the flower, when the sun retires. For this reason alone, especially in snow, a good many nests are deserted before they fall to the assault of the human harpy. Even the sitting bird is not safe. In a neighbour's garden one was seized from her much advertised nest and carried off by a brown owl before the eyes of the horrified gardener; and such a fate befalls a number in town and suburban gardens now that the owls multiply in these congenial surroundings. Nothing is protectively coloured, not bird, or nest or egg. The blue of those thrushes' eggs, "candid as the skies," appeals irresistibly to the artistic sense of many a thoughtless robber. I know one dog, a Russian retriever, that cannot resist them any more successfully than a

boy, and goes a thrush-nesting on his own. As for the blackbirds' eggs they vary so strangely in marking and in groundwork that some oologists are tempted to collect them, as they collect guillemots'.

Missel-thrushes come off better. Their eggs are almost as salient as a kestrel's, their nests, too, are big, and the site is the most solid possible ; but because they build higher, they are less conspicuous, and safer when seen. The human boy is observant, but he sees much better what is below the eyes than what is above. One missel-thrush near me has built in a leafless tree (a balsamic poplar), close beside the road, at the approach to the village, and wholly escaped the enemy that have sought out every humbler thrush and blackbird.

Thrush and blackbird multiply, nevertheless, not much unlike that yet more obvious nester, the house sparrow. Their zeal drives them to precocious home-making, but it also drives them to successive nesting. A pair of swallows, which could not start till late April, and whose young must be strong enough to fly 3,000 miles in October, reared four broods under a neighbour's eaves in 1928. How many times a blackbird will build nobody knows, but the pair will go on and on until success is assured. It was surprisingly proved among

the guillemots that organized robbing of the early eggs, with protection for the late, greatly increased the colonies. One would not like to suggest that the nest-robbing boy is an unconscious preserver ; but while we pity the wasted labour of our too trustful thrushes, we may qualify our regret with the thought that it does much less harm to rob an early nest than a late. The penalty for breaking the close season should be progressive, if the punishment is to fit the crime. May and June are the months that matter most ; and then the kindly leaves, the springing blades, give a surer protection than any cordon of police.

Of the two, the blackbird is, perhaps, more careless than his cousin, the song thrush. The nest is bulkier and more often put in an open hedge, where no evergreens are. The birds ask to be noticed. How they shout with hypocritic alarm when disturbed, how they laugh and crow in the evening ; and the sitting bird varies between a panic and a confidence that are both destructive. I have stroked a hen blackbird on the nest, but more often seen her and heard her fly off with a clutter that proclaims the presence of the nest. She has not the smooth dive of the song thrush when disturbed, and is too seriously alarmed to sit close any longer. Her one compensation is

that the inborn confidence brings her to the neighbourhood of our houses and sanctuary of our gardens, where we could spare any bird better than her orange-billed mate. No song in the list—not blackcap's, nightingale's, or lark's—is so liquid, so near what we mean by music, so fit to be chosen as the herald's trumpet of spring.

APRIL 13: A REVERIE ON SUMMER-TIME

By E. V. Knox

"TIME and tide," said the ignorant proverb-monger, "wait for no man." He reckoned without the spirit of progress and the march of civilization, ever moving onward to nobler and better things. This morning, before the earliest birds had set up their shrill piping, whilst you and I were sunk in dreamless slumber, for a whole hour Time was not. Or to put it in other and perhaps better words, this morning of their own volition the people of England lent sixty minutes to Mr. Ramsay MacDonald's Labour Government, which will be returned to them without any interest from the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the morning of October 5.

It is a rather solemn thought: and we may well ask ourselves whether the Government is likely to do anything worth while with this golden hour which we have sacrificed to them, or will merely waste it in futile vacillation as

they have wasted so many hours in the past. Anyhow, the hour is gone. *Perit et imputatur.* And those who went to bed before twelve o'clock to get their beauty sleep, and altered their alarum clocks before doing so, are looking to-day an hour less beautiful. With some of us, perhaps, this may not be possible, but with the rest we should sympathize.

And since this practice of playing fast and loose with Time in order to secure certain pleasurable ends has now been going on for some years, we may well take stock of the whole position, and ask whether the fibre of British manhood and womanhood shows signs of being impaired or strengthened under the strain.

There are not a great many wholehearted reactionaries. I know one man, a Mr. Wilkinson, a clergyman, who refuses, and always has refused, to alter his watch at the tyrannous majority's behest. He takes the view that nothing, unless it were a circumstance of national peril such as that which influenced the conduct of Joshua during the battle of Gibeon, can justify us in altering those times and seasons which were given to us for our good. At any hour between April and the first Sunday in October if you ask my good friend Mr. Wilkinson the time of day he gives you the right time ; but, ever courteous and charitable

as a clergyman should be, he adds, "Or, if you want to know the Government time, it is so-and-so."

But, as I say, he has few followers. Even in the most rural parts of England there has been no popular *émeute* with regard to this missing hour comparable in any way to the disturbance which followed the filching of eleven days from our calendar in 1752. Pastoral indignation has seethed quietly, but no rioting or bloodshed has occurred.

I met an old shepherd on the Sussex Downs two years ago who offered me some mushrooms which he had collected in a hat. "They're not very good ones nowadays," he explained to me. "But what can you expect with Summer Time?"

The cows, again, say cowmen, are milked too late. I mean to say they are milked too early. They are milked at four instead of at five. But cruelty to cows, happening in the early dawn, has little weight with urban sentimentalists, who only get up in time to consider cruelty to foxes and stags taking place after breakfast has been cleared away. Little children, less important, perhaps, than cows, suffer also from Summer Time, for they are sent to bed at seven and told to go to sleep while the long daylight coming through the window still

torments them with visions of mischief postponed, and keeps them from their guileless dreams. Lovers and their lasses—but what, after all, is love ?—who wander by the scented hedgerows, prefer that dusk should steal early over the meadow-sweet and eglantine, for the lasses in some regions have still to be home by ten. "And ten sharp, mind you, Patricia. None of your not hearing the church clock go!"

And no doubt there are other bucolic martyrdoms. On the whole, I am inclined to attribute the lack of any real revolutionary spirit to the growth of the doctine of Relativity, and the gradual disrepute into which Professor Einstein has, by his insidious propaganda, dragged the whole conception of Time. But there are, of course, undoubted compensations. They fall mainly to the lot of the urban toiler, as Mr. Willett intended that they should. The rich man in his castellated block of flats has perforce to dine, and to dine hugely and well. And he must do this, which can be done as well or even better by artificial light, while tennis and cricket are still going happily on in Battersea Park.

It has been calculated by a statistician, long a friend of my family, that five million seven hundred and eighty-two thousand four hundred

and thirty-six more services and returns pass and re-pass over the top of cord nets during a single day of early summer since we daringly decided to set back the hands of the clock in this England of ours : and even this large total, he candidly admits, makes no allowance for double faults. The sound of the lawn-mower in Greater London goes on until the fireproof curtain is raised and lowered in the central theatres of the Metropolis ; and I have known men to be killing greenfly when their fathers would have been knocking out the last pipe before bolting the front door. Cats, frustrated in their ambitions, are obliged to defer their oratorios. But it is the simple, domestic life which, even amongst the urban toilers, has profited in the main by this rape on the forelock of Time, for one dances and gambles and drinks no better because the daylight still lingers in Endymion Alley or on the roofs of Acacia Grove.

Curiously enough—and I set this forth for the benefit of week-end casuists—daylight saving seems to have entered into no important case at law. Yet it is quite clear, is it not, that if a man has been murdered at half-past two a.m. on this morning of April 13, and shown to have been murdered by the silent evidence of a bullet which has passed through

him and struck the clock at that hour and stopped it (a coincidence which quite often occurs), the jury of twelve good men and true will be obliged to acquit the slayer because there is in the law of England no hour between two and three on this morning of April 13? Ergo, it seems to me, deceased is not dead. However, I may be wrong. I often am about points of law.

FOOD OF THE GODS

By A. A. Milne

TO write properly of asparagus one needs a fine feathery pen. Mine has had a hair in it for a week. Somebody ought to look into this question of superfluous hair in pens. Whence does it come, whither does it go? Or, more profitably, why does it never go? Start the morning with a hair in your pen, and there are two of you writing for the rest of the session. I apologize for my collaborator.

Asparagus. A beautiful word to which the poets have never done justice. When Longfellow wrote "The Wreck of the Hesperus" he must have—wait a moment. *Did* Longfellow write "The Wreck of the Hesperus"? I am shaky on wrecks; there are too many of them in literature.

It was the schooner Hesperus
That sailed the wintry sea;
The boy stood on its burning deck
Whence all had fled but he—
"By thy long beard and glittering eye,
Now wherefore stoppest thou me?"
Toll for the brave.

You see how easily one gets confused. Well, when Southey wrote "The Wreck of the Hesperus," did he ever stop and think to himself, "How much better this would be if I could make it something about asparagus"? I suppose not. When the Rev. J. M. Neale wrote "Jerusalem the Golden," did *he*——. No, obviously not. I oughtn't to have asked the question. But breathes there a bard with soul so dead, who *never* to himself has said, "If I can write of asphodel, why not asparagus as well"? I cannot believe it. Asparagus, or the Works, Human and Divine, of Robert Herrick.

Even our novelists have been reticent, though there may be a reason for that. Asparagus is just a little—is it not?—obvious. We should suspect a novelist who took his heroine to the Savoy and gave her asparagus. We should say, "This man dines once a week at the Regent Palace Hotel. He knows nothing of high life, and is playing for safety." For what we like to read about is that little dinner *à deux, chez* Casani (or Casini or Casooni), at which, as he unfolds his napkin, the hero can remark casually to the admiring heroine, "I always say that Casani's is the only place in London where they know how to do a *sole à la bonne femme*." Then, since he is "one of the few men in

London to whom M. Casani attended personally," he dismisses François or Josef or Mario with a nod, and settles down to it with the great man himself. Probably they decide to follow the sole with a *poulet en casserole* and an *omelette aux fines herbes* ; to the disappointment of the heroine, who lives on a poultry farm in the country, and is going to tell her younger sister all about it when she gets back.

No asparagus at dinner then. What about lunch ? We flip our way through a thousand novels, alert for the magic word, and what do we get ? " Cold grouse and a salad, washed down by a pint of Chablis." Just that ; always that. You and I, if I may suppose you to have attended the same school of manners, were taught not to drink with our mouth full, but, it appears now, mistakenly taught. Perhaps, though, our teacher never envisaged Chablis for us. It is only with Chablis that an obstinate mouthful may be washed down ; and only when he has so washed it down that the hero may " carefully select a cigarette." You and I (to bring you in again) have little scope for selection in our cigarette-case, provided that we left the bent one at home before coming out. Nobody sells us " ten assorted " for sixpence ; they are all brothers in the packet. But it may be—indeed, I often think it must

be—that the proofs of these novels get passed too hastily, and that what the author has intended was no more than this: "Rochester drew out his dainty enamelled case and carefully selected a cigarette-end," having had, we may suppose, a particularly good morning in the Park.

On this question, then, of asparagus (to come back to it with my collaborator's permission) we shall get no help from other so-called writers. We must do our own thinking. Now, if you live in the country, you can grow your own asparagus; or your gardener can grow his—however you put it to each other. At least you would think so. But now I must tell you something; and as it is the only piece of real information in this article, you should turn off the loud-speaker for a moment. Theoretically an asparagus bed takes three years to mature. Practically what happens is that after the second lean year you decide, very naturally, to grow carrots instead (which also wave at the top), and after two years of carrots you decide, again very naturally, to give asparagus one more chance, and after giving it one more chance for another two barren years you decide (and who shall blame you?) on spinach, which doesn't wave, but gets down to it quickly. So in a little while you will have been trying

to grow asparagus for eight years, and you will have come to the conclusion (as I have) that the thing cannot be done. You can buy asparagus, you can eat asparagus (Heavens, yes), but you can't grow it, and you can't read about it.

When I say that you can't read about it, I mean that you can't read about it unless I am writing. I shall continue, therefore, to write. There was a character in one of Anthony Hope's books who was of opinion that, though port tasted better without the conflicting aroma of tobacco, and though a cigar tasted better without the conflicting savour of port, yet port and a cigar together gave a better combined taste than either of them separately. A little subtle, perhaps, but if you have not yet resumed the "headphones," you may get it. Well, I feel the same way about asparagus and *Hollandaise* sauce. I am aware that such an announcement may get me into trouble with the *gourmet* and the *gourmand*. Resisting an attempt by my collaborator to digress into a contemplation of the exact difference between a *gourmet* and a *gourmand*, as to whether, for instance, it is or is not more marked than the difference between an egoist and an egotist, I will tell these gentlemen that all which they are aching to say about melted butter is known to me.

I remained unmoved. A man who loves *Hollandaise* sauce as I do must get at it somehow, and asparagus is the perfect vehicle.

As between French and English asparagus there is no argument. The French sort, which gives you a genteel suck at one end and burns your fingers at the other, is not under discussion. Real asparagus must be eaten to the hilt, so that the last bite imperils the thumb. Now, however unemotional you remain during the encounter, however steeled your nerve, however steady your hand, yet tender fragments, precious seedlings, will crumble off from each shoot as you lave it in the sauce, and be left, green islets in a golden sea, marooned upon the plate. These must be secured at any cost —with the fingers, a spoon, a piece of bread, an old envelope, it matters not. When you are eating asparagus, you are eating asparagus. Reserve your breeding for the brussels sprouts.

As to the last inch of the stalk, whether you eat it or not, circumstances must guide you. It happens sometimes that, when husband and wife have helped themselves from a common dish and there is an odd number of shoots left, so that none can say whether the wife or the husband is to benefit, then they will fall to counting the thumb stalks upon their plates, whereby they hope to remedy any original

unfairness in the first helping. It will occur to you that, if you have disposed completely of this or that number of stalks, then by so much you will advantage yourself in any later readjustment. For, in the presence of asparagus, a man must think for himself, and think quickly.

And now I would give you my "Ode to Asparagus," but it is not yet written, and time presses. Yet, since the earlier poets have been (I suppose) too busy eating it to sing of it, I must do what I can, if it be no more than four lines of tribute:

> Asparagus, in hours of ease,
> A pleasing substitute for peas,
> When pain and anguish wring the brow
> The *only* vegetable, thou.

THE ENGLISH COOK

By A. G. Gardiner

IN the midst of the dolorous record of depressed or decaying British industries, it may seem a small consolation that British cooking is on the up-grade. But such consolation as it is, M. Kriens, the director of cooking under the L.C.C., assures us, we have. In a recent statement, this eminent potentate of the kitchen expressed the view that in a short time English cooks would be among the best cooks in the world. Many of them are already, as the result of the technical training which has become a part of the educational system of London, fulfilling posts of importance in West-End restaurants, and are holding their own against the French and Italian chefs who have so long regarded the fat pastures of English gastronomy as their monopoly and freehold. He even predicted a future for the English waiter, though in this matter he was less confident, for he agreed that the typical Englishman is too independent to observe the

first article of the waiter's craft, which is that "the customer is always right."

But in regard to the future of British cookery his confidence was unequivocal. Nor is there any circumstance that makes this confidence unreasonable. It is true that a notion prevails that the English are congenitally incapable of the art of cookery. That notion has been cultivated by no one more industriously than by ourselves. Coleridge long ago complained that it was a weakness of the English that they flattered other people and depreciated themselves. "They will, for example, praise the Scotch," he said, "but you will never hear a Scotsman praise the English." That may be an extravagance, but it is certainly true that in matters of taste we are among the most self-depreciatory and even most slavish of people. In any form of art or culture we are ready to distrust our own merits and make obeisance before the merits of others. Charles Blank may play the fiddle divinely, but until he calls himself Karel Blankski no one will discover the fact, for no one will believe that a person with so unashamedly English a name can possibly be an artist. It was a tribute to this natural lack of self-confidence when Miss Leggins, of Hull, converted herself into the Mlle Leginska, who has since become world-

famous, especially in the English-speaking countries.

I do not suggest that we should set up a tariff against the importation of artists, whether of the platform, the milliner's shop or the kitchen, as they are proposing to do in Fascist Italy. Let us have the best of everything without regard to its land of origin. But in welcoming others we need not libel ourselves. We need not, for example, cultivate the legend that we are such barbarians that we can neither cook a dinner nor make a dress. In obedience to that legend, we have prostrated ourselves for generations before the shop windows of Paris and the Parisian menu and poured millions of money into the Parisian coffers. And the comedy of the thing is that it was an Englishman with an English name, Worth to wit, who was chiefly responsible for giving Paris its modern eminence in the world of fashion.

It is true, no doubt, and has long been true, that in the arts of the kitchen we have been behind the Latins. Arthur Young commented on the fact in the eighteenth century, and it is an axiom that the French will make a dinner of what the English throw away. We are wasteful and unadventurous, but it is none the less true, and Young himself admitted it, that in the solid and more substantial aspects of

cookery the English surpass the French. But the fine art of cooking has never appealed to us as it has to the French. Perhaps the clue to the mystery may be found in an unchivalrous remark of William Morris, the poet-artist, who did so much to raise the standards of taste in this country. There are two things, Morris once said, which no woman can do : (1) make a dress, (2) cook a dinner. It sounds almost like blasphemy, and we all know women who can do both.

But Morris was speaking of the refinements of those arts, and it is idle to deny that it is the countries in which men cook the dinners and design the dresses that the standard of taste is highest. In England neither cooking nor dressmaking has ever been considered a man's job. Whether men think these crafts are above them or beneath them may be debatable, but there is the fact. I doubt whether I could sew on a button or cook a chop, and in this at least I am a representative Englishman. When we want to know about the mysteries of cooking it is to Mrs. Beeton and Mrs. Glass that we go for information ; but in France it is the great Brillat-Savarin who is the deity of the kitchen, and it is men who are lords of the pots and pans. It is not long ago that the centenary of Savarin was

celebrated in France as a national event, and the French would erect a statue to a good cook as naturally as to a great conqueror. If we were to propose to commemorate the centenary of Mrs. Beeton, London would rock with laughter.

Yet we appreciate good cooking, and see no indignity in men—so long as they are not Englishmen—providing it. If a rich American or a rich Englishman wants a French cook it does not occur to him to engage a woman, as he would do if he wanted an English cook. He engages a man as a matter of course. Soho is thick with foreign cooks, French or Italian, all of them in trousers, and there are few hotels or clubs in the West End in which you would not find a Frenchman reigning down in the kitchen. And so with fashions. In London the arts of dress are the woman's province, into which no self-respecting man would intrude. But in Paris it is the man who is the autocrat of the fashion plates and who dictates what women shall wear and how they shall wear it.

From all this it might be assumed that Morris was right and that we Englishmen ought to make the puddings and trim the hats. But without subscribing to this subversive doctrine we may welcome M. Kriens' assurance that we are at last taking the art of cooking seriously,

and that in this sphere of taste and skill we have as much natural endowment as other peoples. It is a matter of education only. And what we are now doing in cooking we may, by the same attention to training, do in the world of fashion and in the arts of design, which we have hitherto left to the exploitation of the French.

BIOGRAPHY FOR BEGINNERS

By E. C. Bentley

WHEN I am asked how "Biography for Beginners," and the historical method which it initiated, came into existence, my memory turns back to an early spring morning in the last century and a schoolboy's study. I was conning, with the aid of a dictionary, the story of those measures which Julius Cæsar had found, to his regret, to be unavoidable in dealing with the Usipetes and the Tencteri. By some association of ideas, the process of which I am unable now to recall, there drifted across my mind—like a rosy sunset cloud softening the white majesty of the Himalaya—the valiant figure of Sir Humphrey Davy. The pen was in my hand. Musing, I hardly knew what it was tracing on the page. Then, with a start, I saw that I had written:

> Sir Humphrey Davy
> Detested gravy.
> He lived in the odium
> Of having discovered sodium.

So it began.

It was not unnatural that this one of the world's towering figures should present itself for the embodiment of my inspiration. The career of Davy had possessed for me, since infancy, an overmastering fascination. His father's foible of lycanthropy, his mother's descent in the direct line from Attila, had touched my imagination. Adolescent myself, it was with wistful interest that I had learned how Davy, as a youth, had been indulged in his passionate fondness for cock-fighting, trout-tickling and brawling in church. When I found that, in his second term at Oxford, he had been gated for cutting off his tutor's ears, my enthusiasm knew no bounds. I marked with keen sympathy the early establishment of that hatred of gravy which was to colour the whole of Davy's life. I devoured the unholy record of his wild doings as a young man in the London of Weymouth, Dashwood and Rigby ; of his duel with the Chevalier d'Eon ; of his sensational triumph in the pie-eating contest at Tewkesbury ; of his donkey-race against Lord March for a stake of a thousand guineas, each riding with his face to the animal's tail, from Arthur's Club to the Blue Boar at Uxbridge. With mounting admiration I read how, turning his back at length upon idle

pleasures, he applied himself successively to oneiromancy, sinology and catechetics before chemistry engaged the unabated ardours of his maturity.

Wan with excitement, I pored over the pages in which Davy's dedication of himself to the discovery of sodium was described. Strange indeed is it to think now of the shuddering horror, the savage reprobation, with which the enterprise of discovering sodium was popularly regarded in Davy's day. To undertake it was considered to be the act of one dead morally and spiritually, the brand-mark, as it were, of a lost soul. I read how Davy's sisters clung weeping to his knees as they implored him to renounce the awful quest; how old and tried friends bade him choose between their love and the gratifying of a monstrous ambition. He was told how many a man who had entered upon the impious endeavour with a high heart and a song on his lips had sunk into the grave abhorred and shunned. Deaf to all warning as to all entreaty, he set his foot in the path that was to lead him, through tempests of universal opprobrium, to undying fame.

I came to have by heart the text of that volcanic maiden speech in the House of Commons—the speech that made even Dundas tremble, and Jenkinson sob like a child—end-

ing with the imperishable words: "Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of deprivation of necessary chemical constituents? Forbid it, almighty God! I know not what course others may take, but as for me, give me sodium or give me death."

Such was Davy. To epitomize a career such as his—or even one much less crowded and dramatic—within the limits of the literary form devised by me is not by any means an easy task. I have shown that it can be done; but how it is done is a question which I have often had to ask myself. All poets will know what I mean—it is the afflatus, the divine impartation, the rapture. But it is not at all difficult to name some of the things to be avoided in the use of this biographical method.

One must not, in the first place, confine oneself merely to what is historic, in the large sense, about the life that is in question. One has to depict the man as he was, not his achievement only. I may cite as an example of failure in this sense a biography which, because of the weakness I mean, has not been included in either of my published volumes:

> Frederick the Great
> Became King at twenty-eight.
> In a fit of amnesia
> He invaded Silesia.

In this there is nothing with which the dryasdust historiographer could possibly quarrel. The facts are undeniable. Twenty-eight was Frederick's age when he ascended the throne of Prussia; and in invading Silesia he did forget the existence of the Pragmatic Sanction and his own recent pledge to respect the provisions of that instrument. Yet the biography which I have quoted is a fatally defective one. Truthful and reliable—yes; even slavishly so. But where is the human appeal? Where the probing psychological touch? Frederick, after all, was something more than a dynast, a militarist, and a mental case; but in these sapless lines what hint is given us of the riches of that dæmonic personality?

I will give another of the throw-outs, as they may be termed, from the same factory:

> Louis Quatorze
> Had a penchant for wars.
> He sent Turenne to the Palatinate
> With instructions to flatten it.

Here again is accuracy; here is, perhaps, history as it should be written. But where is the real Louis? This, I say again, is not biography.

What, then, of the opposite extreme, the fault of too little attention to the circumstances of historical moment in the life of the hero?

It must, I suppose, be called a fault; but to my own taste, I confess, it is in the class of amiable weaknesses. Without going so far as to say, with Mr. Henry Ford, that "history is bunk," I do consider that the personal element far transcends it in importance when this special literary form is in question. For example, who can deny the excellence of the following biography, the authorship of which I do not know, and which has not, so far as I know, been published?

> The Emperor Pertinax
> Possessed a certain axe
> With which he used to strike
> Those whom he did not like.

This is an admirable presentation, not of the Emperor as he played his part on the world's stage, but of the man as he was known to those nearest and most intimate—a spirit by nature impatient, hasty, temperamental if you will; but sincere, direct, honest, in essence lovable.

But though one may dispense, as I think, with history, what one must have above all is truth—sifted, tested, established veracity. Analysing one's material in this spirit, one courts disillusionment; there will be a loss of much that we have treasured in the human story. I remember too well, for instance, my own chagrin when patient research had con-

vinced me that Oliver Cromwell, as he lay dying at Hampton Court, never did say to Dr. Goodwin, "Had I but served my God as I have served my King, He would not have given me over in my grey hairs." How often, again, have we not been told that Cervantes, on hearing that Dr. Sacheverell had passed the Beresina, filled his mouth with pebbles and observed, "I can make twenty dukes, but not one Titian"? For generations we have believed this. We were foully deceived; the thing is a mere invention.

But by such researches, on the other hand, much that we have valued will be established on the rock of eternal verity, as the skyscraper is stepped in the granite of Manhattan. I have proved, for example, that Henry VIII, on first meeting Anne of Cleves, did after one hurried glance sob convulsively, "Roll up that map." I have shown it to be true that Charles Peace never smiled again after his execution at Millbank. Nor, in the face of my investigations, can doubt be any longer thrown on the moving story of how Leonardo da Vinci, on seeing a Lord Mayor for the first time, fell on his knees and burst into tears.

Such things are among the delightful compensations of the exacting, laborious, too often sorrowful task of the biographer.

PROLEGOMENA TO THE LIFE OF DOCTOR WATSON

By S. C. Roberts

WATSON'S EARLY LIFE

"AS in every phenomenon the Beginning remains always the most notable moment; so with regard to any great man, we rest not till, for our scientific profit or not, the whole circumstances of his first appearance in this Planet, and what manner of Public Entry he made, are with utmost completeness rendered manifest."

So wrote Carlyle, an author from whose voluminous works quotations would readily fall from the lips of Dr. Watson himself. But to render manifest the whole circumstances of Watson's first appearance in this planet is a task before which Boswell himself might well have quailed. Certainly Boswell might have run half over London and fifty times up and down Baker Street with very little reward for his trouble. Where were the friends or rela-

tives who could have given him the information about Watson's early life? "Tadpole" Phelps might have given a few schoolboy anecdotes; young Stamford might have been traced to Harley Street or some provincial surgery and have talked a little about Watson at Bart.'s; his brother had been a skeleton in the family cupboard; his wife, as seems most probable, died some four or five years after marriage; Holmes himself might have deduced much but, except in the famous instance of the fifty-guinea watch, he seldom concerned himself with Watson's private affairs. The young Watson, in short, is an elusive figure. "Data, data, give us data," as Holmes might have said.

Since he took his doctor's degree at the University of London in 1878, Watson's birth may with a fair measure of confidence be assigned to the year 1852.[1]

The place of his birth is wrapped in deeper mystery. At first sight the balance of evidence seems to point to his being a Londoner; much of his written work, at any rate, conveys the suggestion that he was most fully at home in

[1] A distinguished living surgeon, who proceeded to the London doctorate in the same year as Watson, was born in this year. It is of some interest to note that he was in 1916 Consulting Surgeon at Netley, the scene of Watson's own later training.

the sheltering arms of the great metropolis: Baker Street, the Underground, hansom cabs, Turkish baths, November fogs—these, it would seem, are of the very stuff of Watson's life. On the other hand, when, broken in health and fortune, Watson stepped off the *Orontes* on to the Portsmouth jetty, he "naturally gravitated to London, that great cesspool into which all the loungers and idlers of the Empire are irresistibly drained." It is difficult to believe that Watson, in whose veins there flowed a current of honest sentiment, could thus have described his native city. On the whole, we incline to the view that he was born either in Hampshire or Berkshire; it was as he travelled to Winchester [1] ("the old English capital," as he nobly calls it) that he was moved by the beauty of the English countryside: "the little white fleecy clouds . . . the rolling hills around Aldershot, the little red and grey roofs of the farm-steadings peeping out from amidst the light green of the new foliage." "Are they not fresh and beautiful?" he cried out to Holmes. . . . Again, Watson chafed at an August spent in London. It was not the heat that worried him (for an old Indian campaigner, as he said, a thermometer at 90° had no terrors); it was home-sickness: he "yearned

[1] *The Copper Beeches.*

for the glades of the New Forest or the shingle of Southsea. . . ." [1]

Concerning his parents Watson preserves a curious silence. That his father (H. Watson) was, or had been, in comfortable circumstances may fairly be inferred from his possession of a fifty-guinea watch, and from his ability to leave his elder son with good prospects and to send his younger son to a school whence young gentlemen proceeded to Cambridge and the Foreign Office. Watson's reticence about his elder brother is hardly surprising: squandering the legacy bequeathed to him by his father, he lived in poverty, "with occasional short intervals of prosperity." Possibly he was an artist who occasionally sold a picture; more probably he was a gambler. In any event, he died of drink round about the year 1886.[2]

Concerning Watson's boyhood two facts stand out clearly: he spent a portion of it in Australia, and he was sent to school in England. The reference to Australia is categorical. As he stood hand-in-hand with Miss Morstan in the grounds of Pondicherry Lodge, "like two children," as he significantly says, the

[1] *The Cardboard Box.*

[2] For a discussion of this date see *post*, p. 128. At the beginning of *The Sign of Four* Watson had "quite recently" come into the possession of the watch.

scenes of his own childhood came back to him : " I have seen something of the sort on the side of a hill near Ballarat, where the prospectors had been at work." In all probability, then, the period of Watson's Australian residence was before he reached the age of 13.[1]

No reader of Watson's narrative can have failed to notice his curious treatment of his mother.[2] The explanation must surely lie in Mrs. Watson's early decease—probably very soon after her second son's birth. It is, perhaps, a little more fanciful—though not, surely, fantastic—to surmise that she was a devout woman with Tractarian leanings, and that before her death she breathed a last wish into her husband's ear that the child should be called John Henry, after the great Newman himself.

Unable to face life in the old home, Watson *père* set out to make a new life in Australia, taking his two young children with him. Whether he had good luck in the goldfields round Ballarat or in other spheres of speculative adventure, it is evident that he prospered.

[1] Watson and Tadpole Phelps were " little boys " together. On the other hand, it is just possible that Watson gained his knowledge of Australia later (see *post*, p. 127).

[2] The reader may reply : " But Watson never mentions his mother." " That," as Holmes would say, " is the curious treatment."

Of the influence of this Australian upbringing on the character of Doctor Watson we have abundant evidence : his sturdy common sense, his coolness, his adaptability to rough conditions on Dartmoor or elsewhere are marks of that tightening of moral and physical fibre which come from the hard schooling of colonial life. Londoner as he afterwards became, Watson was always ready to doff the bowler hat, to slip his revolver into his coat pocket, and to face a mystery or a murder-gang with a courage which was as steady as it was unostentatious. But to return to Watson's boyhood : that he was sent to one of the public schools of England can hardly be doubted, since one of his intimate friends was Percy Phelps, " a very brilliant boy " who, after a triumphant career at Cambridge, obtained a Foreign Office appointment. He was " extremely well connected." " Even when we were all little boys together," writes Watson, " we knew that his mother's brother was Lord Holdhurst, the great Conservative politician." But Watson's sturdy colonialism was proof against the insidious poison of schoolboy snobbery, and took little account of Phelps's " gaudy relationship." The boy was designated by no more dignified name than " Tadpole," and his fellows found it " rather a

piquant thing" to "chevy him about the playground and hit him over the shins with a wicket"—a sentence which suggests that Watson's school, like many others, preserved certain peculiarities of vocabulary, keeping the old term "playground" for "playing-field" and using "wicket" in the sense of "stump." That it was a "rugger" school there can be little doubt. How else would Watson have played three-quarter for Blackheath in later years? Characteristically, Watson never alludes to his prowess on the football field, until he is reminded of it by "big Bob Ferguson," who once "threw him over the ropes into the crowd at the Old Deer Park."[1] In class-work we may conclude that Watson was able, rather than brilliant; he was two forms below Tadpole Phelps, though of the same age; his school number was thirty-one.[2]

Of Watson's student days we have but scanty record. At St. Bartholomew's Hospital he found himself in an atmosphere that has always been steeped in the tradition of the literary physician,[3] and it is clear that Watson

[1] *The Sussex Vampire.*

[2] *The Retired Colourman.*

[3] The names of Thomas Browne, William Osler, Norman Moore occur at once amongst many others. The late Poet Laureate could probably have contributed some interesting *Watsoniana.*

was not of those who are content with the broad highway of the ordinary textbook. The learned and highly specialized monograph of Percy Trevelyan upon certain obscure nervous lesions, though something of a burden to its publishers, had not escaped the eye of the careful Watson [1]; nor was he unfamiliar with the researches of French psychologists.[2] With such interests in the finer points of neurological technique, it may at first sight seem strange that Watson should have chosen the career of an army surgeon, but after what has already been said of Watson's colonial background, it is clear that in the full vigour of early manhood he could not face the humdrum life of the general practitioner. The appeal of a full, pulsing life of action, coupled with the camaraderie of a regimental mess, was irresistible. Accordingly, we find him proceeding to the army surgeon's course at Netley. Whether he played "rugger" for the United Services is uncertain; his qualification as a "Club" three-quarter was a high one, but it is probable that at this period his passion for horses was developed. His summer quarters were near Shoscombe in Berkshire, and the turf never lost its attraction for him. Half of his wound

[1] *The Resident Patient.*
[2] *The Six Napoleons.*

pension, as he once confessed to Holmes, was spent on racing.[1]

But the scene was soon to be changed. At the end of his course Watson was duly posted to the Northumberland Fusiliers as Assistant Surgeon. With what zest may we picture him opening his account with Cox & Co. at Charing Cross,[2] and purchasing his tin trunk, pith helmet, and all the equipment necessary for Eastern service; with what quiet satisfaction must he have supervised the painting of the legend JOHN H. WATSON, M.D., upon his tin dispatch-box! But events were moving quickly; before Watson could join his regiment, the Second Afghan War had broken out.

It was in the spring of 1880 that Watson embarked, in company with other officers, for service in our Indian dominion. At Bombay he received intelligence that his corps "had advanced through the passes and was already deep in the enemy's country." At Kandahar, which had been occupied by the British in July,[3] Watson joined his regiment, but it was not with his own regiment that he was destined to go into action: "The Fifth marched back to Peshawar, and from there to Lawrencepore;

[1] *Shoscombe Od Place.* [2] *Thor Bridge.*

[3] Walker, *History of the Northumberland Fusiliers*, p. 414.

and . . . in September they received orders for home. . . . So they turned their backs on the tragedy of Maiwand."[1] To Watson, however, the battle of Maiwand, fought on 27th July, 1880, was to become only too vivid a memory. He was removed from his own brigade and attached to the Berkshires (the 66th Foot), the story of whose heroic resistance at Maiwand has passed into military history.[2] Early in the course of the engagement, but not before he had, without loss of nerve, seen his comrades hacked to pieces,[3] Watson had been struck on the shoulder by a Jezail bullet. The bone was shattered and the bullet grazed the subclavian artery; but, thanks to his orderly, Murray, to whose courage and devotion Watson pays a marked tribute, he was saved from falling into the hands of "the murderous Ghazis," and after a pack-horse journey which must have aggravated the pain of the wounded limb, reached the British lines in safety. Of Watson's comrades-in-arms we know little; but seven years later we find him referring to his "old friend Colonel Hayter" as having come under his professional care in Afghanis-

[1] Walker, *History of the Northumberland Fusiliers*, p. 414.

[2] See Hanna, *The Second Afghan War*, III, 416.

[3] *A Study in Scarlet*.

tan.[1] Hayter is described as "a fine old soldier who had seen much of the world," and it would seem fairly safe to identify him with the Major Charles Hayter who was director of Kabul Transport in the Second Afghan War.[2]

The story of Watson's experiences in the base hospital at Peshawar, of his gradual convalescence, of his severe attack of enteric fever ("that curse," in his own graphic phrasing, "of our Indian possessions"), of his final discharge, and of his return to England either late in 1880 or early in 1881, may be read in the pages of his own narrative.[3]

With no kith or kin in England, with a broken constitution and a pension of 11*s.* 6*d.* a day, a man of weaker fibre than John H. Watson might well have sunk into dejection or worse. But Watson quickly realized the dangers of his comfortless and meaningless existence: even the modest hotel in the Strand he found to be beyond his means. Standing one day in the Criterion bar, "as thin as a lath and as brown as a nut," he was tapped on the shoulder by young Stamford, who had

[1] *The Reigate Squires.*

[2] Hanna, *op. cit.*, pp. 470, 525.

[3] *The Study in Scarlet.* Elsewhere in an earlier paper, *A Note on the Watson Problem*, I uncritically accepted the date of this story as 1879, the date given by Father Ronald Knox (*Studies in Satire*, p. 155).

been a dresser under him at Bart.'s. Overjoyed to see a friendly face, Watson immediately carried him off to lunch at the Holborn, where he explained his most pressing need —cheap lodgings. Young Stamford looked "rather strangely" over his wine-glass. Had he some kind of intuition that he was to be one of the great liaison-officers of literary history, that he was shortly to bring about a meeting comparable in its far-reaching influences with that other meeting arranged by Tom Davies in Russell Street, Covent Garden, more than a hundred years before?

Taking Watson with him to the chemical laboratory at St. Bartholomew's, young Stamford fulfilled his mission:

"Dr. Watson, Mr. Sherlock Holmes. . . ."

"How are you?" . . . "You have been in Afghanistan, I perceive."

"How on earth did you know that . . . ?"

Such was the initiatory dialogue. Holmes and Watson quickly agreed to share rooms, and the load of depression was lifted from Watson's mind. Life had a new interest for him; the element of mystery about his prospective fellow-lodger struck him as "very piquant"; as he aptly quoted to young Stamford: "the proper study of mankind is man. . . ."

The walls of No. 221B Baker Street bear no commemorative tablet. It is doubtful indeed whether the house has survived the latter-day onslaught of steel and concrete. Yet Baker Street remains for ever permeated with the Watsonian aura. The dim figures of the Baker Street irregulars scuttle through the November gloom, the ghostly hansom drives away, bearing Holmes and Watson on an errand of mystery.

For some time Holmes himself remained a mystery to his companion. But on the 4th of March, 1881, he revealed himself as a consulting detective ("probably the only one in the world"), and on the same day there came Inspector Gregson's letter relating to the Lauriston Gardens Mystery. After much hesitation Holmes decided to take up the case. "Get your hat," he called to Watson; and though Watson accompanied his friend to the Brixton Road with little enthusiasm, Holmes's brusque summons was in fact a trumpet-call to a new life for Watson. In the course of the adventure which is known to history as *A Study in Scarlet*, Watson's alertness as a medical man is immediately evident. His deduction of the solubility in water of the famous pill was quick and accurate; nor did he fail to diagnose an aortic aneurism in

Jefferson Hope. "The walls of his chest," he recorded in his graphic way, "seemed to thrill and quiver as a frail building would do inside when some powerful engine was at work. In the silence of the room I could hear a dull humming and buzzing noise which proceeded from the same source." At this stage the friendship between Watson and Holmes was only in the making: Holmes still addressed his companion as "Doctor." But it was in this first adventure that Watson found his true *métier*. "I have all the facts in my journal and the public shall know them."

Between 1881 and 1883 (the year of *The Speckled Band*) we have little record of Watson's doings. Possibly he divided his time quietly between Baker Street and his club. More probably he spent a portion of this period abroad. His health and spirits were improving; he had no family ties in England; Holmes was at times a trying companion. Now in later years Watson refers to "an experience of women which extends over many nations and three separate continents."[1] The three continents are clearly Europe, India, and Australia. In Australia he had been but a boy; in India he can have seen few women

[1] *The Sign of Four.*

except the staff-nurses at Peshawar. It is conceivable, though not likely, that he revisited Australia at this time. It is much more probable that Watson spent some time on the Continent and that, in particular, he visited such resorts as contained the additional attraction of a casino. Gambling was the ruling passion of the Watson family. Watson *père* had gambled on his luck as an Australian prospector—and won; his elder son gambled on life—and lost; the younger son (a keen racing man [1] and a dabbler in stocks and shares [2]) no doubt won, and lost, at *rouge et noir*.

By the time of *The Speckled Band* it is noteworthy that the intimacy between Watson and Holmes has very considerably developed. Watson is no longer "Doctor" but "My dear Watson"; Holmes's clients are bidden to speak freely in front of his "intimate friend and associate"; if there is danger afoot, Watson has but one thought: Can he be of help? "Your presence," Holmes told him in the case of the Speckled Band, "might be invaluable." "Then," comes the quick reply, "I shall certainly come." It is the old campaigner who speaks.

The years 1884 and 1885 are again barren

[1] See *ante*, p. 121. [2] *The Dancing Men.*

of detailed Watsonian record ; and here again it is possible that Watson spent part of his time on the Continent. But with the year 1886 we approach one of the major biographical problems of Watson's career—the date of his marriage.

For a proper consideration of the problem it is necessary, first, to clear one's mind of sentiment. We may remember Holmes's own criticism of Watson's first narrative : " Detection is, or ought to be, an exact science, and should be treated in the same cold and unemotional manner. You have attempted to tinge it with romanticism. . . ."

The biographer, when he reaches the story of Watson's courtship, must necessarily endeavour to do justice to its idyllic quality, but, primarily, he is concerned with a problem. Let us review our data :

(1) In *The Sign of Four,* Miss Morstan, according to Watson's narrative, used the phrase : " About six years ago—to be exact, upon the 4th of May, 1882. . . ." This would appear to date the adventure between April and June, 1888.

(2) *A Scandal in Bohemia* is specifically dated 20th March, 1888, and evidently occurred a considerable time after Watson's marriage. Watson had drifted away from Baker Street,

and Holmes had been far afield—in Holland and Odessa.

(3) At the time of *The Reigate Squires*, April, 1887, Holmes and Watson were still together in Baker Street.

(4) The adventure of *The Five Orange Pips* is dated September, 1887, and occurred after Watson's marriage (his wife was visiting her aunt and he had taken the opportunity to occupy his old quarters at Baker Street).

A brief summary of this kind does not, of course, pretend to include all the available data, but is at least sufficient to indicate certain contradictions which Holmes himself would have found difficult to reconcile.

Suppose, for instance, that we accept the traditional date for Watson's engagement to Miss Morstan—the year 1888. In that case the marriage cannot have taken place until the late summer or autumn of that year. What, then, becomes of the extremely precise dating of *A Scandal in Bohemia* and *The Five Orange Pips*?

One thing is clear: Watson, careful chronicler as he is, cannot have been consistently accurate in his dates. The traditional assignment of *The Sign of Four* to the year 1888 rests upon Watson's report of Miss Morstan's conversation; the dates of *The Reigate Squires*

and of *The Five Orange Pips* are first-hand statements of Watson himself.

Now Watson, when he wrote the journal of *The Sign of Four*, cannot be said to have been in his normal business-like condition. From the moment that Miss Morstan entered the sitting-room of No. 221B Baker Street, he was carried away by what he picturesquely calls "mere will-o'-the-wisps of the imagination." He tried to read Winwood Reade's *Martyrdom of Man*, but in vain; his mind ran upon Miss Morstan—"her smiles, the deep, rich tones of her voice, the strange mystery which overhung her life." Further, the Beaune he had taken for lunch had, on his own confession, affected him, and he had been brought to a pitch of exasperation by Holmes's extreme deliberation of manner. On the whole, then, was this a state of mind calculated to produce chronological accuracy?

On the other hand, there are no such reasons to make us doubt the accuracy of *The Reigate Squires* and *The Five Orange Pips*; and if we accept the dates of these, the marriage must be fixed between April and September, 1887. Now, assuming that Miss Morstan shared the common prejudice against the unlucky month, it is not likely that the ceremony took place in May. June, on the other hand, seems

extremely probable, since *The Naval Treaty* (July, 1887) is described as "immediately succeeding the marriage."

Accordingly, we are driven to conclude that *The Sign of Four* belongs to the year 1886, in the autumn of which Watson became engaged. In the early part of 1887 Watson would be busy buying a practice, furnishing a house and dealing with a hundred other details. This would explain why, of the very large number of cases with which Holmes had to deal in this year, Watson has preserved full accounts of only a few. He had made rough notes, but had no time to elaborate them. "All these," [1] he writes in a significant phrase, "I may sketch out at some future date." Again, if June, 1887, be accepted as the date of the marriage, the opening of *A Scandal in Bohemia* becomes for the first time intelligible. Between June, 1887 and March, 1888 there was plenty of time for Watson to put on seven pounds in weight as the result of married happiness and for Holmes to attend to separate summonses from Odessa and The Hague.

To claim definite certainty for such a solution would be extravagant; but as a working hypothesis it has claims which cannot be lightly

[1] The Paradol Chamber, the Amateur Mendicant Society, etc. (See *The Five Orange Pips.*)

dismissed. In any event it may well be considered among the *prolegomena* to the study of Watson's early life.[1]

[1] I am gratified to find that in this matter I have independently come to the same conclusion as Mr. Desmond MacCarthy (*The Listener*, December 11, 1929).

ON READING TOO FAST

By Arthur Ransome

IT is impossible to read too well, but, alas! it is only too easy nowadays to read too fast. For a great many people reading has passed from being a conscious into being an instinctive activity. We can no longer control it. We are become passive rather than active readers. We cannot stop or even put on some kind of brake.

> We are reading machines, always wound up and going
> And master whatever is not worth the knowing.

Faced with an advertisement of somebody's pills in which we are not in the least interested, we are aware of it at a glance, just as we are aware of sunlight and shadow. We do not see an advertisement as a lot of marks which, if we examine them, will prove to be words conveying a message to us. We get the message whether we want it or not. We have no longer need to spell out the letters—whole words,

whole sentences throw themselves at us. Looking at a green field as we pass it in the train, we have no choice whether we shall or shall not read the enormous letters on a pink or yellow board telling us something we do not want to know. We have no sooner noticed that board than we have read it. We have come to read as naturally as we breathe, and the only way in which to stop our eyes from reading is to close them or to direct them where there is no print.

A journey, whether by rail or road, is enough to make us envy the inhabitants of illiterate countries, where it is not worth while to advertise goods except over the shops where they are actually to be sold. In places where most of the people cannot read and have to sign their names with a cross the cobbler hangs out a wooden boot, the baker an elaborate scroll of bread, the glover a gilded glove, and the watchmaker a wooden clock-face on which time stands still. No words are wasted. In such countries there is no inducement to advertisers to plant boards of rhetoric in green fields. What would be the good of setting up the graven image of a beefsteak on the broad Russian plain without the means of conveying to those who saw it where this desirable dish was to be had? You hang up your wooden

beefsteak where you are prepared to serve its juicy prototype, but you do not force the contemplation of it on strangers a hundred miles away. In England, on the other hand, where all can read, all are vulnerable. The advertiser can tell the traveller passing through Yorkshire where to buy beefsteaks in London. He has only to attract our eyes to his print to get it read. It is a melancholy thought that if only reading were a good deal more difficult we should be spared the sight of those horrible pages twenty feet high beside a country road telling us that we should be welcome somewhere where we do not want to go.

The Education Acts are, I suppose, primarily to blame, but after them the modern development of the newspaper which they made possible. There was a time when a newspaper was a handwritten letter of gossip which, when it came from town, would suffice a countryside for a fortnight. Then it became a printed folio sheet. To-day, spread out, it is as big as a blanket, and we get a new one twice a day. It is only when a newspaper is a rarity that it gets read in full. Coming across an odd copy when in foreign parts, I have read the whole of it, even the advertisements, and found some assuagement of my home-sickness in learning that, if I had been in England two

months before, I could have had a chance of buying "A New Semi., 4 beds., 2 ent., kit., scul., gdns., rm. gar., el. pwr.," by applying to a letter and a number "c/o M/c Guard." In such circumstances even these cryptograms became romantic literature. (I have enough Welsh blood in me to be able to pronounce them as they stand.) But normally, in England, people do not read the whole paper. There is too much of it. Instead they have by practice learnt to look through it in such a way that they can be confident that nothing of interest to themselves has escaped them. Professional journalists look through as many as a dozen papers in an hour or so, and when they have done know very well what there is in each. But even the man who runs through one paper only, between his breakfast and his work, performs a feat at once astonishing and sad; astonishing because of the large area of printed matter which he succeeds in surveying, and sad because the habit he acquires of thus surveying print grows upon him until at last he finds it difficult to read in any other way.

Once upon a time everybody recognized that print was a form of frozen sound, and reading was then a form of listening. To-day, with our over-developed ocular skill, we see a sentence, even a paragraph, at a glance and hear

nothing at all. We read so fast that if our reading were still listening we should be hearing every word in that sentence or paragraph at once, or so nearly simultaneously that all the sounds would be telescoped together. Even if we heard them in their right order it would be like listening to a gramophone record spinning at some thousands of revolutions a minute. We should put our fingers in our ears to save them from so horrible a noise.

Reading by sight is good enough for bad writing and too good for some advertisements, but the trouble is that when we come to good writing it is difficult to restrain our eyes and give our ears a chance. It is hardest for those who have read voraciously in youth. Long before they have reached middle age, even if they neglect newspapers, they have acquired a habit of galloping through books, and become aware that, though, perhaps, they read more than ever, they get less from their reading than they did. They look enviously at the man (rarer every day) who reads slowly, his mouth forming the words. It will take him a week to read what they will read in a couple of hours, but there is not the satisfaction in a week of their reading that there is in a couple of hours of his. I always suspect that this is what Hazlitt meant when he said that he never read

a book through after he was thirty. I find that I have to make a continuous effort to read a good book as it should be read and to prevent my eyes from taking in too much of a page at once. Poetry lessens the effort, because the manner of its printing is a reminder that it is not to be read by eye alone. Prose gives no such repeated warning. No white lines hint that we should do well to have a foot on the brake. We eat up the columns like the miles on an arterial road.

I hardly know what is to be done about it, beyond deliberately trying to read as if we had only lately learnt our letters. But one or two observations do seem to suggest a possible though inconvenient remedy. I have long forgotten the little Greek that once carried me through set pages of Thucydides, but I find that a Russian book has a fair chance of being properly read by me. The Russian characters are just enough to prevent me from reading too much at a glance. Although the French use type not much unlike ours I think I come nearer to real reading when I open a French book than when I open an English one. There is just enough strangeness to delay the galloping eye and to give the ear its opportunity. In the same way I relish a book printed before the long "s" went out of fashion, partly

because that unfamiliar letter ever so slightly holds me back. And it occurs to me that here is the best of all arguments in favour of simplified spelling (not in newspapers, but elsewhere). Those who urge simplification of spelling assume that whatever spelling is adopted will be uniform and that it will make reading easier even than it is. I see a faint hope that it might be used to make it more difficult. If every man spells for himself, as once upon a time he did, and if he spells the same word differently in different places, as once upon a time was no reproach to him, we shall again be reading letter by letter, forming the words, listening to catch the sound of them. Sound once again will be the medium, not sight, and good books will be able to count on good readers.

THE UNICORN

NO attempts have yet been made to find out how many readers of The Times obtain it primarily for the sake of the unicorn on the front page; but there is a general consensus of opinion that the spectacle he affords, at peace with his old enemy and recumbent to digest the morning's news, is a very pleasant one with which to begin the day. It is now over three hundred years since the unicorn settled down in English Royal circles, and it is a tribute to his sagacity that he made such excellent provision for himself just before a Danish Professor, appropriately named Ole Wurm, began the fashion, now deplorably common, of baiting him with the charge of fabulosity. Secure in the dignity of the Royal enclosure, the unicorn can afford to neglect rude questions about his origin and pedigree and vulgar cries of "Yah, rhinoceros!" From that last taunt, at any rate, he is now relieved by the appearance of a learned study on the Lore of the Unicorn which has been

completed by Mr. Odell Shepard. Mr. Shepard, like earlier critics, breaks it to the unicorn as gently as he can that he has never actually existed. It is explained that the important thing to have is influence, and that provided you fill men's minds it is quite unnecessary to go through the formality of existing in corporeal shape on the actual earth. Mr. Shepard is too wise to commit himself to a categorical denial that there ever have been unicorns; his sympathies are with the seventeenth-century writer who preferred to "wait till the planet had been ransacked to find out what it did or did not contain"—or, we may add, what it used to contain. But he inclines very heavily to the view that the unicorn is something that we have dreamed, very much as the Red King dreamed Tweedledum and Tweedledee. Nearly all the creatures that men have imagined have been unpleasant, and there is a natural temptation to claim the unicorn because of the great credit he reflects on the human imagination. That it is quite possible to be a powerful and important animal with an influence on everyday events, and yet to be the product of the human brain, is known to every one who has hastened to settle his debts after being visited in sleep by nocturnal horses. But it is expecting too much to think that a proud beast like

the unicorn could be content with anything less than the solid honest-to-goodness existence which is so constantly claimed for him, especially since Julius Cæsar believed in him, and Cæsar had an eye for realities. Nor does Cæsar stand alone. It is difficult indeed for the human race to start denying the existence of unicorns after writing so much about them for so many centuries. We have committed ourselves ; and it is not decent to make every sort of artistic and symbolical use of an animal century after century, and then to begin hinting darkly that he is under the same suspicion as Mrs. Harris.

The ingratitude is the more serious when it is remembered how much unicorns' horns have meant as the sovereign remedy against poison. To-day the death-rate from poisoning is happily much reduced. But if it should show a tendency to rise again, there will at least be this gain that we shall be helped to understand better the intimate hopes and fears of the great personages of European history. There are some—Mr. Odell Shepard is among them—who regard it as now proved that the unicorn's horn is really the narwhal's tusk. This theory —which would make of the eager mediaeval and Renaissance quest for the horn, as a medicine above price, little more than the blind uncon-

scious gropings of humanity feeling its way towards cod-liver oil—makes sorry reading. It is the sort of thing that men feel free to adopt when they no longer fear the vengeance of the unicorn himself. The horn, with which, according to his more enthusiastic biographers, he would impale elephants upon occasion, shrinks to the status of a marine freak. It is altogether more likely that the theorists confuse exact resemblance with identity, and that the British, after adopting the unicorn and matching him with their national animal in fight, and seeing to it that he lost, could not rest till they had connected him with the ocean which is the source of their own strength as well. There are belittlers of everything, even of unicorns' horns; but, whatever may be printed in books, the horn is still honoured in England, at York, at Chester, at Oxford, and at Stonyhurst, to name but a few places. The horn at Oxford, one of the principal treasures of New College, lacks its tip because the Earl of Leicester, having protected the college against the displeasure of Queen Elizabeth, was offered, in the magnanimous way of Senior Common Rooms, to take what he pleased in recognition. But he chose, not a degree, or free tuition, as had no doubt been hoped, but the unicorn's horn. Luckily the bursars of

those days were not less vigilant than the bursars of to-day in preferring the interests of their college to everything else. It was explained to the Earl that he could not have the horn. But he was given the tip, which after all was just as efficacious against poison. It is a sad instance of the general decay of manners that learned men should pass from such reverence to avowed scepticism and an incredulity whose chief foundation is simply that neither they nor their friends ever meet unicorns, as they cannot pretend they deserve to do.

CURIOSITY IN WILD ANIMALS

By G. B. Gooch

APPROACHING the animal kingdom from an anatomical point of view scientists of to-day place *homo sapiens* at the head of the primates, along with the monkeys and apes. A mass of irrefutable evidence has long since accustomed people to this fact. The psychological approach, on the other hand, is to-day a subject of much controversy. Every one admits that between man and animals there is a far greater gap on the mental than on the physical plane. Scientists, indeed, sometimes go so far as to hold that there are two psychologies—human and animal. So long as this division infers that there is a difference only in degree and not in kind, it is perfectly legitimate and may be used with convenience, in the same way that we talk about the psychology of the criminal or the child. When, however, it infers that human and animal psychology are two entirely different things; or when the last-named is approached on the assump-

tion that all animals other than man are governed entirely by instinct, being without feelings or emotions : then, indeed, the fallacy is self-evident. When such an untenable theory as the latter is advanced, it is only natural that the ancient and infallible remedy should be applied. By ascribing everything to " instinct " the simple-minded are deceived, and the theory obtains a foothold, regardless of the fact that the experts themselves are not agreed in their definition of this useful panacea.

Laboratory experiments on animals have often been employed to probe their mental equipment. Usually under such artificial conditions it is impossible to obtain an accurate impression. The most natural method is, of course, to watch the animal in its daily life and in its native haunts. There, it is reasonable to suppose, we may hope to find it using its every faculty in a normal manner. One of the most illuminating of searchlights into the psychology of the wild animal is obtained through a study of its lively curiosity. Even the least observant of us can study this in one aspect, by virtue of the fact that he is of the human species and therefore the object of much curiosity to those wild creatures on whose territory he trespasses. Below are given instances, taken almost at random and from

memory, in which a human being has, wittingly or unwittingly, aroused the curiosity of a wild creature. If this note induces anyone to go into the fields and woodlands and there read for himself a few pages in the book of nature, it will have achieved its purpose.

Walking through the fields in the sun, it is a common thing to see a bumble-bee swerve in its flight and circle around one, often selecting one's face as an object for special investigation. One particularly thorough specimen alighted on a woman's hand and would not leave until it had crawled all over her bare arm, returning again and again to points of especial interest. Fully five minutes elapsed before its passionate curiosity was sufficiently appeased for it to fly away. In much the same way bats will fly round one's head in the evening, occasionally venturing so close that the quick flutter of their wings is heard, and a gentle current of air fans one's cheek as they swerve in their flight. From a safer distance birds will indulge their curiosity, often accompanying one along a hedge to the end of their territory. Keeping on the opposite side, a robin or a wren will peer at one through the foliage, flying ahead again as one passes, or just before. This must be a common experience of every one walking in the country. At

a small fishing village I was once befriended by a robin under peculiar circumstances. It followed me for 300 yards at low tide as I walked round a 400-foot chalk headland, examining the rock pools. The robin watched me turning up stones and groping about in the water, keeping pace with my slow advance. Hopping or flying from rock to rock, the homely little figure seemed strangely out of place on this bleak seashore. Waiting until I had finished, it returned with me to the beach. The fact that the bird followed me so far in such strange surroundings was interesting. Usually a creature does not leave its normal feeding-ground to investigate. Perhaps, as has been suggested, the robin is drawn to man by something higher than vulgar curiosity. It often appears that there is a definite FRIENDSHIP between the two.

Though the earth is thickly peopled with creatures of all denominations, it is but rarely that we realize we are trespassing. Sometimes, however, the fact is brought to one's notice. When watching birds, the appearance of some small rodent has often told me that I am standing on what he regards as his very own little corner of the earth's beautiful surface. Once, while standing on the bank of a small river, watching a little grebe diving, I

noticed a reddish-brown bank vole (*Evotomys glareolus*) at the foot of an alder some sixteen feet distant, apparently intrigued by my presence. Several holes close to the tree suggested that it was a member of a small isolated colony. As I continued my observations on the bird the little fellow continued his, gradually coming towards me for a closer view. The rough nature of the ground and the thick vegetation effectively concealed the vole's movements, except occasionally when its small russet form streaked across an open space. In this way it came to within six inches of my feet! There, peeping out from some dead leaves, it took stock of me with its bright beady eyes, while its quivering nose and twitching whiskers worked incessantly to probe the mystery. Then, having apparently decided that I was harmless, the vole returned to its underground dwelling in an almost unprecedented manner. Instead of again using its devious but sheltered run-ways through the undergrowth, it ran in a leisurely manner down the centre of a narrow footpath, only after fifteen feet plunging into the vegetation near its home.

In these few incidents man has in each case been the involuntary cause of arousing curiosity in a wild animal. Mention must now be made

of animal curiosity aroused by voluntary means. By acting in a manner which the animal concerned does not associate with the human form, it is often possible to retain its attention for many minutes. Reverting to birds and their habit of following one, the friend who was such an object of interest to the bumble-bee once induced a female chaffinch to follow her for some 600 yards along a hedge leading across two fields and through a coppice. This she achieved by the very simple expedient of saying " Sweet ! Sweet ! " in as many tones as she could muster, in answer to the bird's constantly reiterated double call-note. The chaffinch's curiosity was most amusing to witness, for when she stopped under a large beech on the outskirts of the wood, the bird perched on the lower branches of the tree, examining with head cocked first on one side and then on the other this strange human being, continuing to challenge her with its inquisitive call. Presently, hunger apparently ousting curiosity, the bird flew away. On another occasion my friend had a very similar experience with a male cuckoo. Answering its loud notes in a spirit of hilarity rather than in an attempt to mimic the bird, she was surprised and amused to discover that it was coming nearer and nearer, until eventually it settled

in the upper branches of the tree under which she was sitting. There they "cuckoo'd" at one another turn and turn about, the bird descending lower for a closer view. The cuckoo, being in excellent training, soon won this unequal contest, calling by itself for several minutes before realizing that its efforts at having the last word were entirely successful. There being nothing more to interest it, the bird presently flew away.

Unusual movements are often as effective as anything else in catching and retaining the attention of bird or beast. A white handkerchief gently waved to and fro may be successful. In this way I have greatly excited the curiosity of a water vole (*Arvicola amphibius*) in a region where it is by no means easy to approach. The animal was first seen hurrying along the surface of a narrow stream and then disappearing into a hole at water-level in the farther bank. Sitting down opposite the burrow, I slowly waved my handkerchief just above the water. In the dim light of the hole two shiny black eyes gradually materialized as the vole returned to the surface to watch. After several moments of indecision it came out into the open and stood staring at me with its rather prominent eyes, full of curiosity at what it saw but could not understand. One's

usual impression of this species is of a dark streak swimming rapidly across a stream, while observation with field-glasses shows the fur to be a beautiful dark glossy brown. Such was the magnetic influence of my handkerchief that perhaps for a minute I was able to feast my eyes on the vole's compact and lovely little form. At such close range the animal's coat was seen to consist of thick brown fur lavishly interspersed with longer black hairs, the latter outlining the vole with a distinct black halo. Presently, taking to the water, it left me with yet another indelible picture of a few moments in the life of one of our small wild animals.

As is only to be expected, one can often excite the curiosity of a whole flock or herd of creatures just as easily as that of a single individual. My most amusing experience in this direction was obtained late one September evening, when I held a "Mass Meeting of Rabbits" in Devonshire. The screaming of a pair of lapwing overhead and the peculiar undulating "churring" of a nightjar in the valley below, enhanced rather than broke the blessed silence of the night. I sat down to watch and listen. Some time passed before I realized that I was becoming an object of interest to a colony of rabbits, though I did not fully grasp the situation until the familiar

thump of warning sounded close behind. A rabbit, as is its invariable custom on discovering some strange motionless object in its territory, was trying to startle me into a movement which would disclose my identity or intentions. As I did not move, the challenge soon rang out from a different direction, this time answered immediately by another. This apparently aroused the whole colony, for thumps began to resound on all sides. It was impossible to estimate the number of rabbits, as each constantly changed its position. During a momentary pause after a particularly imperious thump! thump! I took up the challenge and, striking the bare earth with the palm of my hand in imitation of a rabbit, I sent back a thump which must have given the boldest of the bucks food for thought. After rather a long pause, they began again, I replying fairly frequently. Such a frenzy of excitement I have never seen! Rendered fearless by their burning curiosity they drew closer on all sides, until often I made out their shapes through the darkness some ten feet distant.

Instead of striking the ground twice in rapid succession with the hind foot, some of them now signalled thump! thump! thump! and as the foot struck for the third time, the rabbit leapt above the bracken to obtain a clearer

view. The darkness was fast closing in, and though they came nearer and nearer, I soon recognized them only as ghostly white patches when in a wild leap or bold scamper the white fur of the tail was revealed. One or two came within four feet, so bold had they become. Though they must long since have realized that I was a man, they seemed to have lost all fear of me, the curiosity I aroused in them now seeming only to add zest to their nightly gambols. The mass meeting threatened to become uproarious! Rabbit after rabbit leaped above the bracken—cotton-tails flashed on every side. It was with regret that I had to adjourn the meeting. As I stood up their play ceased, for I had moved and so broken the spell. Once more I was the dreaded two-legged monster. Before I had moved many paces every rabbit was underground, and silence reigned. The moor seemed suddenly strangely empty.

In children one of the healthiest signs is the possession and exercise of an abundant curiosity. Its possession usually indicates that they are mentally and physically in harmony with their surroundings, and well equipped to put to good account every moment of the day. So with wild animals—the display of a lively curiosity is the surest indication of their well-

being. It tells us that, though their daily actions may be more instinct-governed than ours, they are nevertheless as able as we are to live a full mental life—making all due allowance for the great difference in the mental equipment of man and beast. It may even be reasonably argued that the average animal is relatively more mentally active than the average man. For the wild creature lives a natural life in which it has, for its continued existence, to exercise its every faculty, whereas in civilized countries many men are mere automata for a third of the day—and the mental lethargy engendered by these eight hours of soul-killing routine work often imperils the natural functioning of the brain during the remainder of the twenty-four.

SIM

THE STORY OF A YOUNG LION

THE lion country of Tanganyika would look very much like Richmond Park with the English oak trees replaced by the flat-topped thorn trees of Africa. For hundreds of miles there are grass-covered plains with trees dotted about here and there. During the dry season this region is subject to "prairie" fires, which drive before them in thousands animals of many kinds.

It was after such a fire in September, 1928, that some pitiful little cries were heard by a party of scientific men, who found a tiny lion cub only a few days old. His fur was badly singed, but otherwise he was uninjured. He was about the size of a small rabbit, and although he was quite good at waddling about from side to side, searching vainly for his mother, he was not yet strong enough to stand. Lionesses often give birth to twins, and in all probability the old mother had saved one of them but had been compelled to abandon the

other. The little fellow seemed so delighted to have company that it was decided to adopt him, and he was called "Sim."

By a stroke of luck there happened to be in camp an old nanny goat which had just given birth to a kid, so she was appointed Sim's foster-mother. As soon as she smelt the new addition to her family she showed alarm and had to be held down while Sim helped himself to dinner, but, as soon as the meal was over, she jumped up and showed the greatest interest in her strange baby, mothering him as tenderly as her own offspring. After a few days, Sim's appetite became so prodigious that he had to be given an extra ration of a proprietary milk, from an ordinary feeding-bottle. He thrived amazingly.

Sim was never tied up or put under restraint. He was free to roam wherever he pleased and soon became deeply attached to a pet baboon. While the monkey had to be chained up to prevent his running away to his friends, Sim, on the contrary, never showed any desire to rejoin his relatives, who could be heard roaring around the camp every night. His greatest delight was to sit in the front seat of a motor-car travelling at about thirty miles an hour and watch the other animals.

When the time came for his men friends to

leave Africa, Sim had grown into a fine young lion and was so strongly attached to them, and they to him, that it was decided to send him to America. He was then over six months old and about the size of a collie, but much heavier. As the party planned to return by Paris and London, and had no desire to risk ruining his character, Sim was sent direct from Mombasa to New York.

For the first time in his life he was confined in a large box and delivered to the captain of a freight steamer together with a letter of introduction explaining that he was a nice lion and would soon attach himself to anyone who would let him out! The captain proved to be a lover of animals and immediately opened the box. Out jumped Sim, and within a few minutes he had so completely won the hearts of the captain and the chief steward that the chief steward gave him the upper berth in his cabin and placed outside the door a notice that read: "The occupant of this cabin is a British lion. Beware—don't pull his tail!" From Mombasa to New York Sim had the run of the boat, and when, finally, the Statue of Liberty was sighted, he eagerly watched the shore as if he knew that his old friends were awaiting his arrival. He was not disappointed, but was overjoyed, and, after two days' train

journey, he settled down quietly in the taxidermy department of the Milwaukee Public Museum, where he watched the process of stuffing his relatives.

During the past summer Sim spent most of his time on the roof of the museum, and when the writer saw him a few weeks ago Sim showed his affectionate recognition by taking the writer's hand in his mouth and generally giving him a good licking. He weighed 180 lb., and his enthusiastic greeting, if harmless, was vigorous. Sim is now the guest of the Milwaukee Zoo and is a good proof that animals are usually only wild when someone makes them wild. The easiest way to make a lion wild is to shoot at it.

TREASURY BILL

By C. Patrick Thompson

ONE day in March, 1930, Philip Snowden, Chancellor of the Exchequer in the MacDonald Ministry, sat at his big desk in his private room in the old Treasury Chambers, in Whitehall, cogitating and calculating.

Weighty matters upon the cold mind in that gnomish skull. He was making up his budget of £800,000,000. Cutting into the problem of dealing with a deficit of £13,000,000. Scheming how to raise £30,000,000 of new money. Nicely weighing the respective capacities to bear extra tax burdens of oil, tobacco, beer, dead men's estates and persons making over £1,500 a year.

In the midst of these large affairs he paused. He had become aware of company. Against his withered, semi-paralysed leg a large sandy cat rubbed himself ingratiatingly. He had heard much about this cat, but had never seen him before. Further, he had been told that the cat was aloof, even an unfriendly sort of cat, and that he mustn't mind that.

Had the cat grasped the importance of a softened manner, an ingratiating gesture, in the presence of the rich uncle who presided over the establishment? No doubt he had.

The sandy cat left the man's leg and strolled over to the bright fire that burned in an open grate. He turned, sat down and looked at the white, tight face, into the grim, hard, fighting eye under the domed brow. And the man looked back. And presently the cat arched his back lazily, lay down and rolled over, presenting a furry expanse of tummy to the warmth. "Here," he seemed to say, "we are at home . . . a nice man, after all, when you know him."

The Chancellor went on looking at the cat's back for a little while longer. Then he turned to his desk and made a note on a pad: "Treasury Vote: Approve increase of cat's pay," and went back to his figures.

And that is why the cost of running England and her Empire chain of Dominions, Dependencies and Protectorates around the planet is to be, from the beginning of the new fiscal year, one penny a day more in perpetuity.

A simple little incident. Yet into it is woven a whole epic of injustice suffered patiently for years, of intrigue and struggle, of consummate diplomacy, of precedents broken and awkward problems of sex surmounted, of the personal

intervention of great personages, and of a Chancellor, reputed icy, bitter, ruthless, inflexible and closer with State funds than a Scot with his bawbees, who could not resist—a cat.

Let us begin this tale at the beginning and orient it in its proper setting.

Night is falling on Whitehall, the administrative heart of England, the nerve centre of an Empire upon which the sun never sets. In the middle of this heart and in the centre of this solar plexus lies a block of old buildings grouped round a central rectangle with a bare little railed garden in the middle.

Reading from left to right, or from north to south (as the case may be), these buildings are No. 10, Downing Street, the official residence of the Prime Minister ; the offices of the Privy Council (the King's advisory council) and the Treasury buildings. You might not think it, but all these different buildings are inter-connecting. You can go in by the Prime Minister's front door, walk down the red-carpeted hall, drop your cigarette end in the Premier's hat on the hall table outside his private room (green felt over the door to keep the secrets in), turn right, mount a short flight of steps and, passing through a heavy door, plunge into a maze of corridors that will take you through the Privy Council offices to the Treasury, and so on to

Mr. Snowden's room (you can't miss it, because the door has a sort of port-hole window so that his secretaries can glance in and see what sort of expression the big chief is wearing before they enter).

If you get as far as this without being thrown out on your neck you may proceed to inspect more closely the old interior. Two and a half centuries ago, on the site of the old Palace of Whitehall, these walls were built; and they look it.

No central-heating plant in the big panelled rooms and timbered corridors. Raw coal fires in open grates everywhere. Chairs on which the padded leather was once brown but is now worn pale biscuit and grey. Mahogany furniture that saw the bewigged officials of William IV's day, as the brand on each piece, "William IV," will tell you. Tall, narrow, dark corridors, lined with wooden shelves stacked with the papers and records of two hundred years. Rooms the same.

But hush. Listen. If you have cat's ears you will hear what, anyway, you can guess—the hidden, furtive, ceaseless, multitudinous rustle and bustle of a multitude of mice. For this old rambling block of administrative offices is the cradle of an entire mouse civilization. Mouse empires and colonies behind those

panels and wainscots. Mouse Romes and mouse Babylons. Maybe even a mouse New York.

You will become alarmed for those stacks of State papers. For it is well known that mouse civilizations rise and flourish on the nourishment derived from chewed paper. You will also have disturbed visions of mice trooping from the farthest corners of the Treasury basements to sample the cheese in the Premier's larder ; of the Chancellor disturbed, in abstruse figurings by mice marathons over his carpet ; of grave and learned law lords and State attorneys coming to prepare themselves for the hearing of momentous crown cases before the judicial committee of the Privy Council, and finding families of mice bedded down in their curled wigs.

But calm yourself. Others before you have had the same apprehensions. If you doubt it, listen to those heavy steps. The head doorkeeper approaches. You perceive he is opening doors normally left closed. He is even opening the doors which shut off No. 10 from the Treasury Chambers and the Privy Council offices from both.

And if you make yourself at home on that stack of coal pails in a corner in an angle of the stairs (no elevators here ; everything has to be

man-handled), it should not be long before you become aware of a Presence stealing, silently padding, eddying without a sound, down the corridors of this gloomy echoing old place.

'Tis he! The Terror of the mouse empire, the feline Attila. You have met him before, in the Chancellor's room. Rufus, the Treasury cat, otherwise known (for reasons presently to be explained) as Treasury Bill.

The original Rufus—a good Norman name; Rufus was the Conqueror's son—is said to have come over with William the Conqueror. But the tradition of a cat in the Treasury of England appears to date from the time of Henry VIII's great Chancellor, Cardinal Wolsey, who lived in the Palace of Whitehall and took the air in the little bare garden of the courtyard round which the present buildings are grouped —Wolsey's Garden, they still call the railed plot; and the gate, Wolsey's Gate.

As a red-hatted Cardinal, Wolsey could not marry. Hence, like many a modern bachelor, he kept a cat. Very fond of his cat was Wolsey. He would take it on his knee in those private and intimate moments when he was calculating how much commission he could safely scrape off the next instalment of the King's revenues; and as he figured he would tickle his cat behind the ears with the white,

well-kept fingers of his free hand; and the better pleased he was the harder he would rub his cat, until in the palace they said that a spy outside the door of his eminence's private chamber might tell to a silver groat, by the depth and pitch of his cat's purr, how much of the King's money had stuck to the Cardinal's fingers this time.

No doubt Wolsey's cat was named Rufus—that is a point on which, unfortunately, history is silent—but as far back as men can remember to-day Rufus has always had a *nom de guerre*. England would not be England if it were not thus. Queen Elizabeth was "Good Queen Bess," Henry VIII was "Bluff King Hal," Baldwin is "Safety First Stanley," Snowden is "Our Philip," Lloyd George is "The Welsh Wizard," and the late Earl of Balfour was "Pretty Fanny" (in Ireland, "Bloody Balfour"). So long ago Rufus became "Treasury Bill"—a pun on the financial instrument used by the Government for its weekly short-term borrowings in the money market.

The present Rufus—probably Rufus the Sixtieth, and the fourth Rufus in the memory of Newnham, chief office keeper of the Treasury and his official guardian—was not born in the Treasury. He had already made something of a reputation outside when news of him reached

Whitehall. His predecessor had died, and it chanced that at that time Sir Warren Fisher, permanent Secretary of the Treasury and head of His Majesty's Civil Service, met a friend, a lady of Kent, who complained to him of the behaviour of her cat. It was a youngster, and had taken to hunting the birds in her private aviary.

"Better give him to us," said Warren Fisher. But the lady was fond of the cat and wanted to give him another chance. Consequently the mice in the Treasury were left unmolested for another week, pending news from Kent.

Suddenly the lady arrived at the Treasury with the cat. He had been at his old games. She had caught him with a bird in his mouth. She had given chase. The chauffeur and two maids had joined in. But the cat eluded them. He disappeared with the bird. As soon as he reappeared, however, his mistress seized him, ordered the car and drove immediately to London, where she handed him over to Warren Fisher, who passed him on to Newnham, who gave him a savoury fish head and a saucer of milk and told him his name was now Rufus alias Treasury Bill.

The new Bill settled down nicely, which is not surprising, for the Treasury is the incarnation of all a hunting cat's dreams. He bowed

to the officials, but showed himself disinclined for familiarities. His job absorbed him. He showed from the first a certain high intelligence. He began by bringing his catch back to his guardian's cozy room and leaving them there. But his official chief expressed displeasure at this procedure, and with some violence removed Bill and his quarry to the vicinity of the nearest dustbin in the corridor.

You only have to tell Bill once. Next morning the charwoman arriving to empty that dustbin found the night's catch laid out in a row alongside. What she said is not recorded, and anyway does not matter, because Rufus went on laying them there, and the dustbin is now the official tomb of the mice.

The Rufuses of the Treasury have been carried on the official pay-roll for as long as men can remember, and their pay, twopence a day, has been a regular item in the bill for the State administration duly presented each year to Parliament, debated and voted. Rufus comes on the Treasury Vote.

But twopence a day was the pre-war pay, and the cost of living has risen since the War, and wages and salaries on all sides have been notched up to correspond. In the Civil Service they have in addition to the basic salary a complicated system of cost-of-living bonuses

which contract and expand according to the index figure of the cost of living at fixed periods.

Now, the present Rufus, the grandest hunting cat in the memory of the oldest at the Treasury, has never participated in these benefits. Having no one to press his case, he even went without a war bonus. Quietly and with zest he would go about his business of checking the growth of the mouse civilization behind the wainscots of the Treasury building.

But there came a phase when he got thin. He had always been aloof and elusive. Now he became testy. He failed to pause at sound of a friendly voice. He would not come when called. It took forty minutes and a complicated chase all over Wolsey's Garden to catch him once when his keeper wanted to show him to a visitor. And, most serious of all, his great campaign against the empire of the mice showed signs of slackening up.

People noticed the change. Did it herald the advent of spring? Might it be due to some obscure feline love quarrel? Or was it merely a passing digestive disturbance?

None can say. But one day Noel Curtis-Bennett—the Treasury official whom Baldwin lent to the Miners' Distress Fund and who took the Prince of Wales round the coalfields—was astounded to observe, in his peregrinations

between his office and the office and conference room of the Civil Service Sports Council (of which he is the head) a mouse scampering down the corridor with no Rufus in pursuit. He spoke of it to Warren Fisher, and the subject of Rufus, his function, his character, his terms of service and his pay cropped up at one of the meetings of departmental chiefs. Thereafter discussion passed through the rambling Treasury offices and corridors like a small breeze through trees. The consensus of opinion was that twopence a day was insufficient to provide a hunting cat with the sustenance he ought to have. What Rufus needed was a raise of pay.

Presently, therefore, an official minute went into the Lords of the Treasury ; for even in a matter of a penny of the nation's money the rigid procedure laid down must be strictly observed :

" It is desired to bring to the notice of their Lordships the position at present existing in regard to the allowance made on behalf of the Treasury cat.

" This allowance is now fixed at the sum of twopence per day and it is submitted that in view of the increased cost of living this allowance be raised by at least 50 per centum.

" Submitted for your Lordships' consideration and approval."

So far, so good. But in the Treasury there is no sense of relativity. A million pounds or a halfpenny, it is all one to their Lordships, parliamentary guardians of the public purse. Fixed principles apply as much to the one as to the other. There is no such thing as "a trifle." The same grave judicial consideration is given to a minute suggesting a new expenditure of £100,000 for substituting a central-heating system for raw coal fires as to that suggesting an allowance for undue wear and tear to the office-boy's pants.

The minute came back with another one attached in which their Lordships said that "with reference to your minute relating to the allowance for the Treasury cat," their Lordships had given "full and careful consideration to the case," and "in view of all the circumstances," etcetera, they were "unable to approve an increase."

The outlook looked dark indeed. But, happily for Treasury Bill, there is in the Treasury a fearless woman, who is also a considerable diplomat. She is Dame Maude Lawrence, head of the women in the Civil Service, one of those lean Englishwomen with weather-beaten, kindly faces, who come from country homes and an atmosphere of dogs and horses and have no nonsense about them.

She heard about Treasury Bill and bided her time.

One night she found herself seated beside the Chancellor at a dinner. She spoke to him about Treasury Bill. An injustice. Indeed, almost a scandal. "Our Philip" has a hard eye and a notably rigid jaw. But he has a soft spot. He is fond of animals. He asked for particulars, and got them. Very well, if Dame Lawrence would submit a minute on the case he would see what could be done. He could promise nothing, but undoubtedly the case of Treasury Bill should have his sympathetic consideration.

Thus it came about that a second minute went forth with a right of way this time through my Lords of the Treasury clear up to the Chancellor, stating the case for Treasury Bill and pleading for a 50 per centum increase of pay. But a somewhat awkward circumstance attached to the new situation.

For years and years, indeed, ever since women were first admitted into that male preserve, the State service, there has been a row about unequal rates of pay as between the sexes. It has been Dame Lawrence's job to argue unceasingly for equality of pay and allowances and bonuses and conditions. And here she was committed, in a careless moment of kind-

ness, to urge a rise in the existing pay of a male member of the Treasury personnel. True, only a cat. But still a male. Sex, after all, is sex.

She inquired if Treasury Bill had a wife. No, he was a confirmed bachelor. There was some suspicion that he had affairs with the ladies, but if that were so his motto evidently was " Love 'em and leave 'em." No regular union could be traced to him. No female feline had a shadow of legal claim on him, so far as the authorities knew.

Dame Lawrence therefore decided to take an imaginary case, so that if at any time a female cat should arrive in the Treasury and get on the pay-roll there should be a record of her protest for equal pay made at the time of the application for a raise in the pay of Treasury Bill. Hence the Chancellor (himself a bit of a dialect poet) received with the formal minute the following little poem :

What's this I hear ?
That Rufus the Cat has got a rise.
Threepence a day until he dies !
Bone-us, too, on top of that—
But what about me ?—Dinah, the Cat ?

Unequal pay is still my fate,
Subsistence allowance at a very poor rate.
Of course I ignore the marriage bar,
But my dependents are many, from near and far.

I pray you, Chancellor, give some heed
To the angry mew of a Tabbie in need.
At least establish me on the mat
With a family allowance.
(Signed) Dinah the Cat.

It was on the day following the dispatch of this minute and poem that some unknown hand softly opened the door of the Chancellor's sanctum sanctorum and, with friendly intent, slipped in Bill for his official interview with the big chief ; and the scene occurred which I have vignetted at the beginning of this tale.

When I last saw Treasury Bill he was basking in the spring sunshine on the warm stone of the Treasury back door. He looked plump but a trifle tired. " And no wonder," said his guardian, when I made the comment, " for he's just polished off a whole cod's head and a saucer of milk, after being on the rampage all night. Come in, sir, and see the kill."

But dead mice hung up by the tails are not a sight I care about, so I tickled Bill behind his ear until he purred and left him to his dreams of the opulence and richness of life for an official cat drawing pay at the rate of threepence a day from the Treasury of England.

REVIEWING

By A. N. Monkhouse

A FRIEND who is a reviewer told me that the other day he had read "with relief" a review of a book which he had praised. The reviewer who is at once enterprising and conscientious likes to be the first, or one of the first, to greet a good book, but he would be disconcerted to find himself the only one. And so my friend, who had not so far succeeded in finding anyone who estimated this book as he did, was relieved when a reviewer of authority followed on what he believed to be the right side. Of course it is well for critics to have a reasonable amount of confidence in themselves, but we are all liable to lapses and most of us have been guilty of a few "howlers" which we blush to recall. And you are not much good as a reviewer if you are perpetually canny and wait for assurance or fortification before you deliver your opinion. One reads reviews that are of no value whatever because the reviewer is obviously keeping to safe, conventional lines.

Reviewing is not always a simple matter even to the practised hand ; few of us can maintain either an evenness of mood or a condition of mind eagerly responsive. I recall an occasion when I had to write a notice of a play and I was not in the mood for it. I knew the play and I knew the actor, and both, to my knowledge and experience, were good. Yet I was not exhilarated, I could not rise to the occasion. I felt that my mood left me hardly capable of doing justice to the performance and that, to be fair, I must make some allowance for it. So I tried to raise the tone of the notice a little above what I felt ; I tried to put the play and the actor where I thought they should be. Some time afterwards a man whose opinion I valued wrote to tell me that he had gone to the play on the strength of my recommendation and that he had been disappointed ; it was not as good as I had made out. And yet I had meant well.

Perhaps this is not a common experience, but reviewers of books cannot always escape something like it. Perhaps it is one of the causes of reviews being too favourable, as they so often are. It is pleasanter to praise than to blame and it " gets your name up," as the schoolboys used to say. Reviewers who praise profusely are likely to be quoted in advertise-

ments, and in these days when names or initials are freely used the advertisement is not only for the book. I am afraid that reviewers have sometimes written particular sentences with the intention of getting them quoted. But even the reviewer who has an austere conception of his duty finds a difficulty in the limitations of vocabulary. I recall a critic—he must be nameless here—who would simplify his task by reducing books or plays to two sorts. "There are masterpieces," he said, "and there is rubbish; men of genius and duffers; I decline to recognize anything between." After all, this is something like the old idea of separating sheep and goats on Judgment Day. Yet most of us are timid about these broad generalizations. We should like to make infinite distinctions, but there are not infinite degrees in our vocabulary. From bosh to masterpiece we should like to have fifty steps in adjective or epithet, but we have to make shift with half a dozen.

Perhaps we shall be driven to a system of marks; there is always some complaint about critics lacking criteria. So many marks might be given for conception, construction, diction, rhythm, character, etc. Or, as reviewers are confessedly uncertain and vulnerable, they might be abolished altogether in favour of

publishers' advertisements, blurbs, and the Book Clubs. Reviewing may become a bad habit. There are writers of distinction who have frittered themselves away on it. Yet there is something attractive about reviewing, or at least about receiving books for review. I recall a reviewer who said that he really did not want to review, but that he could not bear to deprive himself of the pleasure of opening the parcels containing new books. And then there is the joy of discovering a new author. Here, however, the publisher steps in. It is he who discovered the new author, or so he may reasonably contend. The reviewer's work is merely adjustment. It is pleasing, even touching, to see how a publisher's confidence in an author grows. He is doubtful about taking the book, but he becomes its champion. He heralds it, he lets everybody know that it is coming. Of course this is all in the way of business, and it is directed at both public and reviewer. And now publishers are beginning to obtain authoritative pronouncements in favour of a book to accompany its publication. I am not sure that they are wise. It does not always prejudice a reviewer in a book's favour to be told what he ought to say about it.

To a considerable extent books are reviewed by the writers of books, and we are all familiar

with the suggestion that reviewers are authors soured by want of success. The facts are against this, for a large proportion of the reviewers are successful authors. Successful, that is, in a moderate degree ; I suppose that when you produce a *Trilby* or an *If Winter Comes* or a *Good Companions* you don't want to bother much with reviewing. Competent reviewers abound, and one of the cruellest of editorial functions must be to turn a blank side to appeals for reviewing backed by admirable credentials. There is a plethora of reviewers for what may be called belles-lettres, and doubtless the standards of appreciation and critical good taste are higher than they were a generation ago. One way to qualify as a reviewer is to make yourself an authority on a particular subject, but there may be a danger here ; it is assumed too readily that you must be incompetent outside this subject. It is very much the case of those unfortunate actors who get a reputation in a narrow range of parts; you may, for instance, make a hit as a lunatic undertaker, and then you must wait until another play with a lunatic undertaker in it comes round. When the specialist reviewer writes a book himself there may be a slightly precarious state of things. The editor of the paper to which he contributes wants a fair

review of the book, but it would not be very nice if the alternative reviewer slated it. And what are you to do if there is only one man in the world competent to review the highly specialized book and he is notoriously at loggerheads with the author? When you consider all the difficulties, the pitfalls, in the relations of reviewers to authors and realize how rarely we reach positive fisticuffs it does seem that these are two very admirable bodies.

THE WELL-KNOWN NOVEL

By Gerald Gould

I MUST say, I object to being called "well-known"—it is the certificate of insignificance. But hardest of all is it when I find in the papers—almost always underneath the photograph of somebody else—the legend: "Mr. Gerald Gould, the well-known novelist." For I, alone of human kind, have not written a novel. It is for this abstinence that I should wish to be well known.

And yet, I am not so sure! Perhaps I will write a novel after all. It cannot be difficult, and I feel a sort of yearning. . . . Already the incidents begin to shape themselves under my pen. The mistake with most novels, I find, is that they are—I mean each one of them is—all of a piece. What the reader really wants is variety; and my novel will give him that. I have scheduled the different types that are popular, and my proposal is simply to mix them in. I cannot conceive that any member of the reading public will be disappointed with the result.

We must begin in the country. I don't know why, but experience teaches me that this is absolutely essential. There is something innocent and old-world about the country. Larks sing, and nightingales : the wild rose blushes in the hedge like the dawn of love : and what with the coming of evening, and the scent of hay, and the quietness of the skies, and the slow flowering of the stars, and the voices of the wind in the willows and the water under the bridge, it will go hard if we cannot get up a love-scene for Gertie. (Gertie is, of course, my heroine's name.) The sweet child herself wears gingham frocks and goo-goo eyes, and is the sole support of a brutal father, whose specialities are mortgage and manure. He holds what I may call the manurial rights of the district ; everything else is slipping from him. Recreations : horse-whipping.

In the limited edition, I ought to mention, the country won't be in the least like that. There will be no purling or puling, no still unravished brides of anybody. The village's middle name will be perversion, and dirt the order of the day. But I cannot do you lust and violence under twenty-five shillings ; the seven-and-sixpenny public must suffer, and will, I trust, prefer, innocence and roses. But you know what innocence exists for ? . . . Well, that is where

Gerald comes in. I am sorry my hero should have to be called Gerald, but I am given to understand there is no alternative. Besides, I hate the fellow. This is really going to be the hardest part of the book to write, because a single false step will not save me. *Everything* must be false. My hero must be strong and silent, wistful and wordy ; must excel at manly sports and exercises (such as contract bridge) and at the same time must reek of Chelsea ; must talk in familiar epigrams, and be misunderstood. He must seduce innocence, but *pour le bon motif*. If you ask me why he can't marry the girl and have done with it, I can only remind you of the wife in a lunatic asylum. (Really, I do not ask for much help from my readers, but I ought not to need to cross my t's before I come to them.)

Seduction is easy. The technique is now quite established and universal, and any attempt to depart from it would probably bring a smart reproof from the Society of Authors. You describe the nightingale, and the scent of hay, and the quietness of the skies, and the slow flowering of the stars, and then, very quickly, you put four little dots. Like this ". . . ." And begin the next chapter with a deadly briskness. I shall begin mine, so as to be original, in a dope-house in Shanghai.

For I am uncomfortably aware that vice, real honest-to-badness vice, as distinct from merely "going wrong," has had a poor show up till now; and I fear my novel-reader may get impatient. There must in every story be at least one episode of hot, strong, peppery sensuality, with nearly everything said and the rest hinted. Gerald (and I must confess I rejoice at his downfall—the oaf!) has become an opium-fiend and a sponger on unfortunate women. Why the sickly idiot should have gone to Shanghai, or how he got there, or why the unfortunate women should support him (except, of course, that he reminds them of their own sons, whom they have not seen for twenty-five years), I don't understand; but you can guess what is happening meanwhile to the wretched Gertie. Gertie is being horsewhipped daily, for her disgraceful condition has been discovered, and her father is almost fanatical in his cult of physical exercise. He is irritable, too, and has taken to drink. His mortgage grows from more to more, and even manure no longer means to him what it did.

The problem now is—how to get Gerald and Gertie together again! The wife in the lunatic asylum has naturally died, for we are approaching the last chapter; there seems nothing to keep these young people apart except de-

generacy and the sundering seas. I forgot to say, moreover, that Gerald has a friend—a quiet, trustworthy fellow, an outside broker by profession, with eyes of steel-blue, a twisted smile, a slight limp in the left leg, and hair going grey at the temples. Outside broking has taken him to Shanghai, in pursuit of a shady client, and one night—for at his heart gnaws the hunger for the definitely unattainable Gertie—he flings decency and honour to the winds. He is only flesh and blood, as I ought perhaps to have mentioned ; and chance, or inscrutable fate, or the pixies that haunt an author's pen, has, or have, led him to the dope-house where Gerald lies. "All I ask of you, Monsieur," cries one of the unfortunate women, in her broken French, "is to save him from unfortunate women such as we!"

Little is left to tell. The mortgage is foreclosed, the end foretold. Gertie's father, persisting in horsewhipping despite the grave advice of the old family doctor, who warns him that he has a weak heart, is cut short in the flower of his daily dozen. Gerald (the pernicious ass!) is redeemed. Gertie is married in the nick of time. The career of their son at Montessori school and preparatory, up to the age of thirteen, will be traced in the next two volumes.

And now, for a breathing-space, let us contemplate the home in which my novel will be read; order, and decorum, and the ancient and patient loyalties, and the adventure that renews itself. Why should such nice people read such stuff? . . . Well, cheer up! Possibly they will never read it. Possibly, even, they will never get it to read.

THE GODDESS

By Robert Lynd

A FAMOUS actress died not long ago, and it was easy to see from the comments in the newspapers that many now middle-aged men in Fleet Street had been her adoring slaves in their youth. An odd thing about these comments was, however, that most of the writers seemed to assume that the goddesses of the stage have all but vanished in these days of the cinema, and that the theatre is no longer the haunt of adoring youth that it used to be. I fancy that the explanation is that the ex-adorers have grown older, not that the goddesses have ceased to be worshipped. So long as the theatre exists at all, it is difficult to believe that it will not be the temple of young idolators. To fall in love with an actress at some time of one's life is not only natural but inevitable.

There are, of course, degrees in the strength and subtlety of this passion. There are some people who are so much in love with the stage

itself that they are ready to worship almost anybody who appears on it down to the little housemaid with the three-line part. They study the programme with such avidity that they could repeat months afterwards the names of the most insignificant actors and actresses who took part in the play. I was myself for a time of that disposition. To see an actor walking along the street was an exciting event. If you had told me: "There's the chap who played Rosencranz last night going into the tobacconist's," I should have stared after him with a Cortesian awe. It was as if his very presence in the streets increased the dignity of my native city. It would have gratified me more to have shaken hands with him than with the Moderator of the General Assembly.

This general passion for the stage, however, is an entirely different thing from the concentrated devotion fixed on a single actor or actress. And it is only a few actors and actresses who have the power of converting an indiscriminate bewitchment with the theatre into an ecstasy of personal adoration. Even after personal adoration begins, it is true, one still continues, if not to admire all actors and actresses, at least to have particularly warm feelings for all the members of the company with whom the adored actress is playing.

They must all, one feels, share one's own adoration, and anyone who adores her is one's friend. A scrap of gossip telling how popular she is with the chorus-girls moves the worshipper like a tale of supreme nobility of character. But, indeed, the beauty of her character is as manifest as the beauty of her face. She may sing all kinds of trivial words, such as "I wink at the boys on the sly," but in the imagination these become touched with a strange and almost sacred loveliness and they haunt the memory as exquisitely as "Sabrina fair" itself.

Of all forms of love, this, I think, is the most disinterested. The lover is content to love without hope that he will ever even exchange a word with the adored one or shake her by the hand. Night after night he will climb up to the gallery—I went six times in a single week to one musical comedy—and wait in the darkness for the sudden entrance from the wings, more glorious than a sunrise, and the entrancing singing of the always entrancing song, "There was once a merry monkey in a cosy little cage," the chorus ending, as the adored finger is shaken at the gallery. "Now, who *was* that little monkey? Was it you?" Strange the thrill produced by that shaken finger and by the glance that accompanied it. For every worshipper in the house felt that that

glance was somehow—no doubt, by accident—directed at himself, and he was even embarrassed by being singled out in this fashion in the presence of so many other people. Luckily, the glance did not last long, and the dance began, in which the most beautiful woman on earth gave the most delicious imitation of the antics of a monkey. Who could have failed to encore such a heavenly song and dance? Who could have failed to encore it twice, thrice, four times and even after that to continue applauding in the wish that the song would go on for ever?

On the occasion of the first visit, perhaps, one is inclined to be impatient of the turns that occupy the stage between one of her appearances and the next. As one sees the musical comedy again and again, however, one begins under her spell to discover unexpected beauties in the other parts of the performance. The broken English of the Frenchman seems extraordinarily witty: "the green-eyed lobster," as a description of jealousy, grows upon one curiously with repetition. Even the sentimental songs that had always seemed to unadoring ears to be the bane of musical comedy are seen here to be of noble quality.

Where'er you are, the sun is always shining,
Where'er you are, the skies are always blue—

Yes, as the tenor sings them, they do express the passion of love as it was never expressed in musical comedy before. The whole musical comedy, indeed, is, as one's neighbour (also under the spell) confesses, a work of art quite unlike all the other pieces of the kind one has seen. It has a well-constructed and ingenious plot. The music is the best since Sullivan. The dialogue is really witty. And, as for the company, there was never such a company in the history of musical comedy.

Then home with the book of words—if not the holy writ of beauty, at least a book to be preferred to it at this rapturous hour. To re-read the songs was to live those precious moments over again. "There was once a merry monkey"—how lovely her smile was as she sang it!

> Where'er you are, the sun is always shining,
> Where'er you are, the skies are always blue—

Well, perhaps it was the music rather than the words that made it so poignant, so expressive of heartache. But then to the lover all words seem to fall below the height of his own unparalleled passion. That is why he turns aside even from Shakespeare and writes poetry himself. Not at the time, perhaps—not just after returning from the musical comedy—but weeks afterwards, when the beloved in the

course of her provincial tour has arrived at Glasgow.

It is difficult to do any work during such a week. It is necessary to be in the streets as much as possible lest at any moment she should drive by. A friend—enviable and undeserving man—announces calmly that she had stopped him in the street to inquire the way to the Post Office. Such an event might happen to oneself, though to a reasonable mind it might seem unlikely that an actress would keep on asking the way to the Post Office when once she knew it. But love does not know reason, and the divine possibility of such an encounter lit up the streets like a Paradise. Her lovely smile as she asked her way could be imagined, the thrilled voice of the worshipper as he replied: "The Post Office? Oh, it's the first turn to the left"—and then? Parting for ever? Or the beginning of a great friendship? But the glorious accident never happened. Still, she did drive past one day when a worshipper was there to see her and to stand and stare after her till she was out of sight. But how melancholy she looked! How wistful! How pale! How unlike the happy, laughing goddess who had sung "There was once a merry monkey" in the theatre!

It is a terrific enough experience to love a

goddess who appears to be perfectly happy. But it is as nothing compared to the experience of loving a goddess who seems for some unaccountable reason to be miserable. How heroic her laughter on the stage now seems! How one longs (metaphorically, it may be) to give one's life for her! Beautiful as the words of "There was once a merry monkey" had seemed before, they are now informed with a new and tragic beauty. The light-heartedness of the theatre is seen to be heroic. . . . Then the goddess disappears, and the city returns to darkness. Her photograph, to be sure, is on the mantelpiece; and at the end of every week the *Stage* arrives with an account of her appearance at Liverpool or Bradford, or wherever she had arrived in her provincial tour. Only those who have loved can know the happiness to be found in reading the provincial notes in a stage newspaper. There is a disinterested leap of the heart at sight of the words: "Cora Bandini brought the house down with her song 'There was once a merry monkey,'" or "Cora Bandini, with her clever singing and dancing, established herself as a warm favourite," or "A large audience encored Cora Bandini's songs again and again." When you can read sentences like that about anybody except yourself with rapture, believe me, you are in love. . . .

The letter was posted, but it was never answered. It contained a poem of which any poet would no doubt be ashamed, and an offer not only of devotion, but of help, should she ever need it. Not that there would have been any use in her sending for help in money (for there was no money) or for the help of a strong right arm (for there was no strong right arm). But help was offered, just plain, vague, honest help in whatever part of the world she happened to be when she needed it. Perhaps the offer was too vague to be thought worth acknowledging. But that was not the reason why love dwindled. It simply and mysteriously dwindled. It lasted, I suppose, for a year, but at the end of about a year the *Stage* lost one of its most ardent and assiduous subscribers.

THE SHINING GRACES

By J. B. Priestley

A RECENT column in the paper succeeded in startling me twice over in the course of a few lines. It told me that Miss Marie Studholme, the former musical comedy actress, was dead, and then it also told me that she had been born and bred in a place not five miles from my old home. I had forgotten the existence of this actress, and never once have I set eyes on her, even on the stage, yet these two facts in the paragraph conjured me back immediately into my boyhood. Once more I saw those shining postcards, of which Marie Studholme, for ever flashing immaculate teeth, was perhaps the queen. The whole shining bevy of graces returned to memory, fresh and glossy from the wholesale photographer's: Marie Studholme, Gertie Millar, Gabrielle Ray, the Dares, Zena and Phyllis (and their brother —was he an engineer?—for such is fame, so great the power of beauty, that he was photographed too). The postcard age lived again.

There are picture postcards still, just as there are roller-skating rinks, grey toppers, whiskers and oyster bars, but they are little more than an article of commerce. Here and there, in faded provincial towns, people may still collect them, but their glory has departed. Many a stationer and fancy-goods man must sigh when he remembers the trade he did once in albums for them, albums of every size and quality, frivolous albums for the coloured comic ones, charming medium albums for the actresses, the kittens, the puppies, the fishing fleets, the massive heavies for the views of Notre Dame and the Bay of Naples. The cards themselves blossomed in every other shop window. Blackpool alone, which had a marked taste for the low comic cards, boarders in night-shirts, amorous fat women, and the sea-sick of every quality, must have imported millions of them. In those days a postman's life was worth living; he could entertain himself and learn something about the world on his rounds. On thousands and thousands of bamboo tables in the corners of drawing-rooms, the albums were piled up, ready for the next visitors. And in these albums, on page after page, shining in best sepia finish, the beautiful musical comedy actresses smiled upon an adoring world. They could not vote; they could not enter Parlia-

ment or sit upon the Bench; their property was at the disposal of their husbands, if they were married; they were still members of a downtrodden sex; but nevertheless they smiled and smiled, and not a tear dimmed their eyes and not a curl was out of place.

I remember now that it was not the men who were the enthusiastic collectors of these shining graces, though the men were not above examining and comparing them. I seem to recollect that it was the girls, the young women, the older sisters of my friends of those days, who piled Studholmes on Rays and sought frantically for yet more Dares, just as it is the girls and women who line up, I believe, to applaud Miss Tallulah Bankhead, and swarm to see the Greta Garbos. Feminine beauty attracts a feminine audience. All the girls in our provincial place lived more richly because of Marie Studholme's teeth and Gabrielle Ray's demure loveliness, and the dark good looks of Zena and the bright good looks of Phyllis Dare. No doubt thousands of girls, after a brief interval of despair, became steadily prettier by simply staring and staring at those postcards; not beauty "born of murmuring sound," as with Wordsworth's heroine, but beauty born of best glossy finish. These beauties of the postcards had no such fame as our contem-

porary film stars, whose very wrinkles and eyelashes are familiar to millions, yet they had, I think, a unique fame of their own, for they smiled along every street that could boast of a few shops, and in a hundred thousand drawing-rooms and parlours, wherever picture postcards found their way. What they got out of it, whether they enjoyed it, I do not know. Their stage careers were a mystery to me then, and I have never met one of them since.

Indeed, I only ever saw one of them on the stage, and that was the youngest of those shining graces—Miss Phyllis Dare. I stood at the back of the pit, clutching my school cap, in our old Theatre Royal, and saw her play in *The Dairymaids*, the first musical comedy I ever attended. That astonishing world of pretty girls and dancing dudes and comic uncles, now—alas !—wearing a very machine-made look, burst upon me, to the sound of our Theatre Royal augmented orchestra—oh ! a Pisgah sight ! The stately Gibson girls were hardly my style, but there was a comic sailor who pleased me—and there was Miss Phyllis Dare, lovely, riotous, enchanting. I fell in love with her at once. If there had been millions more postcards, they would have been more than justified, though what postcard,

what mere photograph, no matter how artfully posed and brilliantly glossed, could do justice to that graceful and vivacious creature, that fountain of high spirits? When the interval came and everybody else went off to struggle for bottles of Bass, I stayed where I was, leaning against the wall, feverishly planning a career that would turn me as soon as possible into a comic sailor. That Miss Dare's brother (the engineer?) should be photographed and postcarded surprised me no longer; I would have had her uncles, cousins, second cousins, all shrined on postcards, for even the most distant of them would have been touched with glamour. It is astonishing to me now to think that this excellent actress is actually a contemporary of mine, for to me she dates from the era of legends. I have friends who are acquainted with her, and no doubt if I pressed them they would consent to introduce me; but it seems to me incredible, even now. It would be like meeting Rosalind out of Arden. I should shrink from it, and would prefer to stand for ever, bewitched, my school cap screwed in a hot grasp, at the back of that pit.

I was, I admit, very susceptible in those days. (Curiously enough, later on, when I drew nearer the age when young men are supposed to haunt stage-doors, this suscepti-

bility vanished, and I have been a heart-free playgoer ever since.) I did not go to the theatre often then, but when I did, I promptly fell in love. Outside, I could be austere, and still sneer at the sex, but once in that thick warm atmosphere of gas, oranges and heated humans, I was the worshipper of some visiting goddess. There is an actress playing comedy parts in the West End now, who lighted a whole six weeks of winter for me, when I was at school and she was playing principal girl in our local pantomime. I stared down from the gallery at her white neck and glossy black ringlets until my eyes ached as well as my heart. It was thrilling merely to see her name in print. Almost suffocated with secret emotion, I would introduce that name into the talk. The " Last Two Weeks " on the bills meant the very end of everything, for I saw less and less opportunity of saving her life somehow just outside the theatre. She came, she went, and she never knew.

Why did the postcards come and go so quickly too ? Why, for a few years, did everybody want to collect pearly teeth and curls and dimples, and then after that care no more about them ? What was it that flared up, covered acres of cards with bewitching smiles, and then died down ? We know well enough

that since then fame and rewards beyond the dreams of the young Miss Marie Studholme have been offered, by the film industry, to pretty girls ; yet, in spite of that, it is difficult not to feel that when the postcards went, something, a kind of astounded wonder at feminine prettiness, went with them. Before the postcards came, people had lined the roads to see a famous beauty, had cheered and mobbed her ; you read of it in one age after another, down to the beginning of our own time. The picture postcards, I suspect, absorbed the last traces of that wondering and worshipping spirit. Since then there have been beautiful women, pretty women, innumerable, more than ever probably, but no crowds, no cheering, no collecting and comparing. Now we mutter " sex appeal " and walk away. But then perhaps the common standard of feminine looks has been raised, and is still shooting up, so that whole bevies of typists and shop assistants and young matrons are on the picture-postcard level of loveliness. What happens to the susceptible youths, I do not know. I do know that if somebody had talked to me about " sex appeal " in my early youth, I should have wanted to enter a monastery.

HARRY WELDON

By Matthew Norgate

SO Harry Weldon's dead; and with his death is severed yet another link with the music-hall of the past, the music-hall of low comedy and comic songs and acrobatics, where one sought and found honest, thoughtless entertainment instead of refinement and pretentiousness. Peace to his ashes!

He used to be billed, I remember, as "The 'S No Use Comedian," and the description was apter than most of its kind. It was derived, of course, from his catch-phrase "'S no use," which he uttered with more frequency and infinitely more meaning than Harry Tate's "How's your father?" or Robey's "I meanter say." But the fact that it was not ephemeral, that it was appropriate, and used appropriately, to every situation in which he found himself, is indicative of his claim—not that he ever would have made such a claim—to be an artist as well as an "artiste." For everything this queer cornucopian creature attempted was

nugatory and no use. His shortcomings, in fact, were the essence of his art. His policeman ate monkey-nuts, his prison-warder knitted socks for the convicts while they escaped, his boxer was a coward, his dancing was elephantine, and he could not walk across the stage without tripping. Failure was the keynote of his success, and one's heart went out to one who was probably doing only a little worse than one might have done oneself in similar circumstances.

Like many other comedians, he had a knack of taking his audience into his confidence, but he did so by far subtler means than any other I can think of. Formby, the best of all exponents of this particular motif, was frankly and personally apologetic. He, too, could neither sing nor dance, but when his efforts came to grief he used to make explanatory speeches. He had bronchitis, the stage was slippery, any excuse would do, but there was always an excuse. But Weldon, like Sergius Saranoff, never apologized. His apologies were implicit in his every tone and gesture, but failure he never would admit. He never even dared look at his audience, but kept his eyes glued to the ground, as if to catch our eye was to see in it a recognition of his deficiency and to participate in that recognition. So

when he came on, shouting into the wings, "So long, lad, see y'after, after t'show," when he inquired before deciding how to entertain us, "Anybody been singing a sentimental song-ng-ng? Ruth Vincent been on-n-n?" and then retired to a corner to practise "I Passed by Your Window," one felt that here was a friendly soul anxious to oblige, and that any shortcomings must be glossed over for fear of hurting his feelings.

Though Weldon's absurdities were always in character, he contrived somehow to make them all a commentary on aspects of the halls. He gave no "slight impressions" of rival stars, but there was always a streak of friendly burlesque running through his work. He would lollop to the O.P. corner, shade his eyes, and gaze into that imaginary vista whose secrets are known only to G. H. Elliot and Fred Barnes, or he would sing:

I'm going back, back, back, back, back to Alabam
If I catch, catch, catch, catch, if I can catch a tram,

in the manner of a hundred home-sick song-birds whose birthplace was no nearer Alabama than Wigan or Whitechapel. But no amount of divagations can recall that fat and fatuous face, so well-meaning but so hopelessly foolish.

We shall revel no more in the plight of the "White Hope," nor hear again his appeal for a challenger to a ten-round contest, hastily altered, when signs of a challenger appeared, to "Any lady?"; and we may as well give up wondering what he really did do to Colin Bell. 'S no use!

AN EARLY VICTORIAN MIRROR

By Louis Golding

IT was by pure accident I wandered into that fragrant house in the Cotswolds. I need not tell the story—of certain broken bottles and two torn tyres, of a gracious lady and a bowl of *pot-pourri*, of a rosewood spinet and a silver teapot under a flowered cosy. Not many hours later the car was speeding once more on its way to the Welsh borderlands, and I had in my mind a memory which seemed half an illusion. Chance had taken me into a quiet house embowered in orchards. Nothing that belonged to it did not belong to a period I had all my life made jest of—the house was a fortress of the Early Victorian spirit. Or should I say it was a cathedral? No. Both words would be alike inappropriate. It was strong but not formidable, it was fragrant with the savour, not of incense, but of rose-petals. It was a house, in a sense in which we have ceased to construct or to conceive houses. It was intimate but not secretive; it was affable,

but there was something ceremonial in the disposition of the chairs, in the importance of the teapot. As the car hummed westward, I knew that the age whose spirit visibly inhabited there, the Early Victorian Age, was something remoter to us than the Age of Elizabeth ; that we of the cocktail age, we the beshingled and plus-foured, are nearer in sympathy to Boadicea than to the young Victoria.

A sadness fell upon me, which all the singing streams of Radnorshire did not dissipate, nor all the yellow hills of heaped butter in the cheerful farm-kitchens. Young Victoria was dead. But lately a certain volume fell into my hands which has built up again for my imagination that solitary house and all that epoch, so wistful, so elegant, of which that house is now the sole habitation. I should not say that the book built up the Early Victorian Age again, so much as that it supplemented the house and interpreted it. The scent of *pot-pourri* was in my nostrils again. A delicate small hand evoked Scarlatti, Donizetti, Halévy, from the keys of the rosewood spinet.

The book I am speaking of could not, in fact, have been much more Early Victorian. Only two years had elapsed since a very young and lovely maiden had ascended the Throne. " There is scarcely a human being in the

dominions of our Sovereign," writes the Editorial Chronicler, " who is not solicitous for her welfare and anxious to promote her happiness." Hers is the personality, young, charming, genteel, formal, that dominates the twelve monthly volumes that are bound together to constitute *The World of Fashion.* But I must be permitted to give the work its full and elegant title: *The World of Fashion and Continental Feuilletons, a Monthly Publication Dedicated to High Life, Fashionable Fashions, Polite Literature, Fine Arts, The Operas, Theatres, Embellished with London and Parisian Fashions and Costumes of all Nations.* It is the editorship of the volume that most winsomely commends itself to me. " Edited," we are informed, " by several literary and fashionable characters."

Do you not see a maiden, in that Early Victorian house in the Cotswolds, sitting before her rosewood spinet? Do you not hear the faint silvery tinklings? Whom is she waiting for? Why does she sigh so delicately? Her beau is one of these same literary and fashionable characters. He is preparing himself to pay her his respects. (The description of these preparations occurs in the section entitled " Gossip and Gaieties of High Life " for December.) " His lordship steps before the

cheval glass, tightens his cravat, so as to give himself a colour, draws the fingers of his right hand a dozen times through his front hair, studies the most becoming position of his hat, arranges most tastefully his locks, puts on his French kid gloves, then exercises himself in balancing a small switch." Then he sallies forth. . . .

How your blushes become you, O maiden of the spinet! But that ringlet on your left cheek there . . . curl it a moment about your tiny finger. So. The tendrils of honeysuckle are not so fragrant.

Let us not be so indelicate as to spy upon their meeting. Let us join the ladies, whose images are pictured in a series of delightfully hand-coloured fashion plates, six to every issue. Behold this " organdie robe, over white satin, sprigged with orange Cashmere worsted." This, of course, is for evening wear. " The *corsage*," I would have you know, " is tight to the shape, made nearly but not quite *à la vierge*, and trimmed *à l'enfant*." Do you know any imagist poem lovelier? And how shall she do her hair? Let it be " disposed in full clusters of ringlets, and ornamented with a *guirlande* of intermingled roses and *marabous*." Repent ye, O ye shorn women! Cry penance upon your Eton crops!

What shall she wear when she goes forth in her phaeton in St. James's Park of a morning? Shall it be a black satin pelisse over a figured lilac silk robe? Or a pearl grey satin *redingote*, closed in front by two *montans*, which form lappels and are edged with black lace? Or a pelisse of emerald green *gros de Naples*, with a pale rose-coloured *pou de soie* hat, trimmed with roses, white ribbons and a *tulle* veil? It should be observed that these costumes may be worn *en promenade*. True that "formerly it was a thing unheard of for a lady to walk." None the less—*O tempora, o mores!*—"it is not unusual for women of fashion to be seen in the principal streets on foot, either shopping or making morning calls—always, of course, attended by a footman." But always. But of course.

There is only one occupation which can wean the chronicler from the raptures produced in him by the thought of these lovely garments—it is the contemplation of the more lambent virtues of the reigning sovereign. It took him some time to get over the shock caused by his discovery of the appalling dangers which had recently threatened her youthful Majesty. "A short time ago, a silversmith, who was said to be insane, entered the palace in St. James's Park, unobserved, and was only

detected when he had arrived in the Queen's apartments; and now we find that a boy had been discovered in the same palace, who gave a very extraordinary account of himself. It appeared, that after a *siesta* in a chimney, he had deposited his person in the bed of the Hon. C. Murray, one of the Grooms in Waiting, wherein was found a pot of bear's grease, from which the young rogue had copiously helped himself. For what is the train of functionaries retained about the person of the Sovereign, if not to afford her protection against insult and injury? How do they perform their duties? Here we find the illustrious lady exposed to mad and wicked persons, who are rambling about the palace day and night, and another resting himself within a few yards of her Majesty's chamber. Where is the gallantry of the noble lords and gentlemen?" . . . and so on, and so on. Really, the gentleman becomes quite prolix and peevish in his anxiety. However, when the illustrious lady goes stag-hunting, he is his own self again. "The stag was unearthed close by, and on being at liberty, after taking a few stately strides, turned round and gazed for a few seconds upon the Royal party, as if in astonishment at the honour conferred by such distinguished visitors, and at his being selected for the day's amusement."

But as the months of the year 1839 rotate upon their smooth wheels, a whisper swells upon the breeze from the east. The whisper increases from month to month in volume and sweetness; yet for all its sweetness it is more exciting by far than that marvellous new shawl which the Lady Seymour wore at the tournament at Eglintoun, or than Taglioni's latest ballet at His Majesty's, or the publication of Lady Bulwer Lytton's *roman à clef*, or the performance at Drury Lane of the Rossini opera. What then? What is the purport of this whispering behind fans and over the circulating port? At Brooks's, at White's, at Almack's, the rumour is not still. The marriage is contemplated, they say, between—yes, yes, between?—between Her Majesty and a certain gentleman. Yes, of course, but what gentleman? A prince, a German prince, Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg. "It does not appear to us,"—in September—"that even were the event contemplated at all, the arrangements had been carried so far as to authorize us in stating that it would take place." In October "the rumour has created a sensation in the continental courts, where, while some treat it as a mere idle fabrication, others do positively insist that a marriage is in contemplation." The Court news for *The World of*

Fashion not more than one month later records, quite simply, the fact that "the arrival of Prince Albert has given a new impetus to the pleasures and gaieties of the Court." In December "we are at length enabled to communicate the interesting intelligence to our readers that the marriage of our young and lovely Sovereign to the Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg is resolved upon."

Can you reprove "M. Z." if, in the transports induced by this announcement, her heart gushes into song!

> Illustrious Victoria; thy name
> Shall be prophetic of thy glorious fame;
> Victorious abroad o'er all thy foes;
> Victorious the reign of England's rose!

The actual nuptials will not take place yet for some months. The epoch of Early Victorianism has a little time to run before it attains its consummation and enters upon its decline. But it is never too soon for "the loveliest portion of the human race" to bethink itself of the dresses by which it will celebrate the royal, the almost divine, occasion. For you, my lady, what of "a robe of rose-coloured satin, a low *corsage* sitting close to the shape; the skirt is bordered with a single flounce of point lace, of a very antique pattern"? Or here is "a robe of striped gauze, over white

satin ; the skirt is trimmed in a very novel style, with flounces and ribbon ornaments."

This way, oh my gentle ones, treading lightly, treading ghostily. I have lovely bonnets to show you, of satin wadded or quilted, the interior is trimmed with a wreath of roses without leaves. Here are shawls, ladies. They will be much in favour this season.

OLD ODELL

By J. P. Collins

IT has been given to few men to figure at the Royal Academy in a masterpiece of marble, and then to have a niche carved in a club-room wall to contain it as a permanent possession. Munificence like this seems more in keeping with the Bank of England or the Mansion House than it does with the haunts of Bohemia. Yet there is a liberality about the *gens de St. Denis* that the City well might envy. They cling to their memories with a fanatical tenacity. They recall the echoes of convivial merriment that have long been dim. They cherish anything that reminds them of nights and suppers with the gods. And that is why a certain bust will occupy a place of honour at the Savage Club, we trust, when the last apologist for the hop and the grape shall, in the midst of a region of statutory drought, take his stand by some municipal soda-fountain to sketch the ruins of Barclay and Perkins's brewery.

Some irreverent individual has likened that work of Albert Toft's to "a death-mask of Moses modelled in suds." But this is only a picturesque way of describing a bit of sculpture that is like none other for its flowing lines, its blend of the wilful and the venerable, and all those marks of incongruity and eccentricity that are perpetuated in its title, "Old Odell." In that long career of his he was painted, etched, and caricatured a hundred times. His haunting face, with its high cheek-bones, its vaulted and shaggy brows, its eyes of mischief and darkness, the parenthetic pucker round a mouth of pungent eloquence, the long majestic beard, and the air as of a Druid unfrocked—these revealed a spirit unwearied and indomitable in the crusade of amusement. The annals of English humour are rich in instances of men grown old in spite of themselves, and maintaining their touch on all the chords of laughter. But surely no case can be cited where so whimsical a spirit of comedy survived under so solemn an exterior.

The Victorian Age specialized in "potent, grave, and reverend seniors," and Odell could have made a livelihood, perhaps, as a model for Leighton or Alma Tadema. But there never was a man less constituted to pose in an attitude of decorum or submission in an artist's studio,

or behave with any sort of deference to people with a title. Against convention or etiquette he was a proclaimed and husky rebel, and the more he outraged expectation, the better he felt he had fulfilled his mission. His only form of orthodoxy was adherence to a garb that consorted with his peculiar dignity—a black frock-coat and a Rembrandt hat with a dash of Mother Shipton in its conformation. Until a few years ago there were people who could remember him in less imposing attire, and linen not so spotless in its hue. But having trained himself to look like what someone called " an undertaker's grandfather," he loyally kept up the part, and this was the only part he ever did.

His age was a matter of conjecture and tradition. To assess it was like assigning a date to a hill or a cathedral. It is said that he did not " suspect his years " himself, and when once I questioned him, he wandered off into a memory of the day he met Dickens on Ratcliffe Highway, and got a compliment on his acting. It was the Yorick Club, I believe, that fixed his birthday on the same day as Shakespeare's, by way of a tribute and a compliment. " To which of us ? " the Ancient asked. At any rate, once he owned an anniversary, he had to be endowed with a year of origin, so the Yoricks fixed his age at seventy, for a start.

They hammered the tradition in by entertaining him every Shakespeare night and sending him " home " in high good humour and a cab. Worse for liquor he never was, and the universal admission as to this was not unmixed with envy, as he said himself. Finally, by a sort of Hudibrastic calculation, the date of his birth was fixed as 1834, and as he reached the year 1930, arithmeticians might work out the sum for themselves. " I am ill at these numbers," he used to say in Hamlet's language, but with the usual twist of meaning. Though he was no *littérateur*, he commanded admiration by his lifelong devotion to the Bard. In an enormous repertoire of recitation, there was one monologue where his memory never failed. It was a crowning speciality, Launce's apostrophe to his dog, and nobody who ever heard him is likely to forget the comic unction he put into it. He had no singing voice, but his rendering of " Harvest Home " was punctuated with inimitable bits of " gag," and the echoes of its chorus will haunt the Adelphi for many years to come.

When John Locke said that age and virtue were worthy titles to a just priority, he might have obliged us with a definition. The term virtue is capable of more than one interpretation, and the stricter one—thanks to the decline

of the pulpit and other causes—seems to be going out of fashion. But there was a time when virtue meant the quality of man, and this argues a line of exclusion where Odell was a true expert. If he was not actually a woman-hater, he used to rejoice in his immunity from the sex, and one has heard it said that women loathed him. The waitresses that were called upon to serve him certainly did, and so did some of the actresses with whom in former times he used to appear. It is told that at the end of one spring season, when the company were wishing each other good-bye, some members announced the "busking" programmes at seaside and other resorts on which they were bound for the summer months. Odell waited till he saw a chance of scoring against a leading lady who had treated him with unbearable scorn. With a vagabond swagger, he sidled across the stage to the imperious Kate Santley, and ogled her with a characteristic leer as he said—"We won't tell them where we are going; will we, duckie?" Like the laughter it aroused, the suggestion was so odious that it roused her to fury. And if she never played Katharine the Shrew before, she did it then.

Those who want stories of Old Odell—and they are legion—will find them in many a racy volume of theatrical recollection. The

late Weedon Grossmith has told how he entered into a conspiracy with a couple of brother-Savages to track him down to the domicile that the Ancient used to keep concealed (when he had one) with a persevering ingenuity that showed how long he had been at bay against the duns. The plot proved a failure. They insisted on seeing him home, and he trapes'd them northwards as far as Pentonville at three in the morning. When they asked how much further he was leading them, he turned in mock amazement and said he was seeing them home, and not they him. The three trudged as far back as Maiden Lane, and there he gave them the slip. For he dived into some uninviting haunt, saying it was a private club where guests were not admitted, and they had to give up the chase.

A still better story, and no less true, was the famous "raid on Reading," and this you will find at its best in Edwin Ward's delightful *Recollections of a Savage*. In an expansive moment a distinguished guest at one of the Club's Saturday nights betrayed himself into a general invitation. It was an opportunity of visiting him at his country house, and the moment the guest gave it out, the list grew and grew. When the fateful day arrived, it included a group of the choicest specimens that

Bohemia could furnish a generation ago, which is saying a good deal. They turned up in the wildest array of raiment at their disposal, and the amazement they created on the platform at Paddington was nothing to the consternation they occasioned at that country manor. The host and hostess were entertaining a luncheon party of intimate friends, but they proved equal to the shock, and in the uproarious scenes that ensued, they say that the leader of the revels was easily Odell. He riveted all eyes upon himself with his ponderous whimsicality, his graveyard air of saying the oddest things, his knack of bringing into any and every company the atmosphere of the convivial haunts he had so long adorned. And if he could achieve so much in conditions of surprise, it may be guessed how he excelled among his cronies in quarters like the Yorick, the Urban, and the Savage Clubs.

The sole occasion when Odell figured in a court of law was when he was one of a group of beneficiaries under a will that had to be set aside. A certain Savage directed that for ever and a day four of the brethren should be served with a drink daily to the extent of a florin apiece. But it was war-time, and the decrees of D.O.R.A. were paramount. It was argued that the festive clause was out of key

with the period, and on a technical point or something, this objection carried the day. Those hundreds therefore went to benefit a school in St. James's parish, and a flock of little Jacobites were clad and fed instead, leaving Old Odell's opinion of the law, if possible, at a lower level than ever.

Two ambitions he nursed almost to the end. One was to reach his hundredth year, and in four or five more it would have been realized. His other aspiration was to have a benefit at his favourite theatre, the Haymarket. He wanted to play Malvolio again, but this time as a nonagenarian ; and here again he was disappointed. For two or three years he brought the project up at intervals, and he begged more than one old colleague to join him in the cast. In defiance of all probability, he urged that there were people who would pay to see the lover played by a man who had passed his ninth decade; but cronies alive to the facts either put him off with evasions and half-promises, or else endeavoured to dissuade him, and in vain. The old man must have been tremendously in earnest, for he kept his temper under these rebuffs—a course which was unusual, for he was the very soul of explosive candour. But it was not to be. The listeners bethought them of other veterans who used to

tatter Shakespeare to the bitter end—Barry Sullivan, for instance, who played at playing Hamlet, with spidery knees and a broken croak, until the very gods rebelled. Over and over again Odell was asked what on earth he wanted with the money he hoped a benefit would bring. What on earth could an old man do with the proceeds, when he was provided for already, and had no reasonable wish ungratified? His line of reply was Lear's—that an old man with such memories of power ought not to have his privileges docked—

> O, reason not the need; our basest beggars
> Are in the poorest thing superfluous.

In the end, no theatre was available, so all was for the best. But the old man went to his grave convinced that this benighted era had lost its greatest stage event. Perhaps the real truth was that the cynics in the stalls had missed a rare chance of venting their derision at folly in senility.

But there were times when he had his way. He boasted to me once of being the only man who had ever quelled that "arbitrary gent," the late W. S. Gilbert. They were rehearsing *Dan'l Druce* at the Haymarket, and Odell, as Reuben, begged the author to write him a few lines so as to justify a certain exit. At last

Gilbert turned and told him they could dispense with his services. Odell clapped on his hat in a huff, and was stalking across Trafalgar Square in heavy dudgeon, when the manager ran after him and begged him to come back and resume the part on any terms. So he won the day, for Gilbert wrote the extra lines, and it was probably the only occasion when that grumpy genius was ever brought to book.

The paradox of his career arrived when he became the inmate of one of the sedatest of institutions. King Edward, when Prince of Wales, was the first of three generations to honour the Savage as a member, and one night, after enjoying Odell's recitations, he asked where on earth so curious a character dwelt. Nobody knew but the Ancient himself, and the Prince hit upon a thought that could have occurred to no one else. He had a right of nomination to the time-honoured Brotherhood of the Charterhouse, and offered to use it in the old man's favour. It was a curious juxtaposition, this planting of the King of Bohemia among the grey old walls that had harboured Colonel Newcome, and given Thackeray inspiration for one of the tenderest scenes in fiction. But the boldness of the notion, and the royal status of its "onlie begetter," carried it through, and for more than twenty years

Odell was a dweller in that half-monastic refuge where so many venerable brethren of broken fortunes have closed their days. Needless to say, he was a thorn in the side of authority. He wore the gown in chapel and conformed in his way to the decrees and regulations of the place, but it was a task beyond the Master's powers to make him return at the respectable hour prescribed by the rules. And many was the night when the old man came back in hansom or taxi to scrape through the gates by the indulgence of the porter.

The day came when, after many warnings, the old man was "gated," and the janitor was ordered to bar his egress. For a while, therefore, the Ancient was a prisoner, and ate his heart out under a sense of rankling injustice. His old accustomed haunts knew him no more, and, as a matter of fact, feelings were not unmixed. There was the empty chair wherein he used to sit and sip his grog, and nod to old acquaintance, and season his discourse with spells of silence still more eloquent. Those who knew him best recall how he listened with muttering impatience to younger fry who aired their callow views about the stage. The stage, forsooth! What could they know of theatres and "stars" who were puling infants in the years when he had already retired from

the scene of his triumphs? He had never excelled in the way of facial expression, except in a limited way of his own, and nature had made him notorious amends with a vitriolic tongue. But he never looked so blank and bored as when he had to hearken to the talk of men he regarded as upstarts and incompetents. Now this was over, and the old corner in the "north-west room" was haunted by his accusing ghost. It was explained, with good reason, that the policy of incarceration was a preventive and a salutary one. The police were tired of piloting so frail a wayfarer across the roaring thoroughfares of Smithfield and the Strand. The prospect of such a patriarch, and a brother of the Charterhouse to boot, perishing under a lorry was too disturbing by far. The best way to reduce the risk was to circumscribe his movements, and prolong his days by shortening his tether. Nor was the Master's inhibition without support outside.

One or two indulgent spirits, however, with more sympathy than prudence, argued in favour of the rule being relaxed. Here was a veteran and public favourite who for six or seven decades had been pickled with whisky and tickled with applause. Why should he, like the delinquent in the song, be "condemned to dwell in a dungeon cell on a spot that's always

barred"? But as soon as the point was raised, there were others who soon dissented in no measured terms. "Why interfere?" was the line of reply. "You haven't had to put up with the old man's tantrums, his insubordination, and his debts. If you'd had this experience you would concur in the Master's view, and leave him where he is." So the battle of remonstrance was loud and long.

Impenitent and unconvinced, one of the crusaders went to visit the old man in his tribulation, and wrote the doleful story up in the *Observer*. The effect was instantaneous, a veritable gaol-delivery. That very night, Odell trimmed his beard and donned his high-peaked hat, and was soon shuffling along as of old to the chair and the company of his affections. When next we met, he exclaimed as he took me by the arm—"Oh, my dear friend, that was a splendid column. It did the trick, my boy! I got a letter from the Master that very day, and here I am." No such street calamity took place as we had feared, and for a few months more the Ancient kept his ancient ways. Then came a blank again, and this time the mastery was not to be questioned. Instead of figuring in a gory inquest, or pining disconsolately in his cell, the old man had died, like the old lady in Dickens's story of the caul,

triumphantly in bed. There was a quiet funeral, with a handful of cronies to pay the last sad offices of mortality, and the reign of the King of Bohemia was over. Old Odell had passed into the region of memory—almost of myth. But more than one of us can say *tantum vidi*, and will try to keep his laurels green in the best loved club in all the world.

LONG NOVELS

By Michael Sadleir

I

THE appearance last year, and within a very few weeks, of two abnormally long fictions by writers of experience and capacity [1] could not but encourage the theory (already for a year or more vaguely prevalent in the coulisses of the book-world) that we were in for a revival of the long novel. It was said, on the one hand, that the public were taking a taste for cumulative rather than deftly sparing fiction; on the other, that because life itself is rather a protracted turmoil of experience than a series of brief dramatic incidents, novels which pretend to portray life must have room in which to do their job. In consequence (so it was said), novelists who write to please themselves were beginning to write long because they felt they must; novelists who write to please the world

[1] *The Good Companions.* By J. B. Priestley. Heineman. 10*s.* 6*d.* *Wolf Solent.* By John Cowper Powys. Cape. 15*s.*

would soon write long also, because the world would have it so.

Perhaps; and again perhaps not. The reasoning is neat enough, but is the matter quite so simple as all that?

To begin with, what precisely, within the meaning of the present act, *is* a "long novel"? Is it a story of more than a certain number of words? Is it a story built to a certain generous scale of plot or time-duration? The latter argues agreement on a point which could never be agreed. The former is more manageable, though even here there is difficulty, and at the very outset. Neither of the two books which provide a text for this discourse, although by modern standards very long indeed, would have seemed alarmingly long to readers of seventy years ago. Perhaps, therefore, a "long novel" must be defined as a novel of noticeably more than the average length prevailing at its period. We know what to-day we call an ordinary novel; but was there, prior to the last forty years, any average novel-length, and if so, what was it?

In the eighteenth century, and up to about 1820, no such average existed. Novels appeared in small 12mo. volumes, each containing anything from 30,000 to 50,000 words, and the number of volumes issued was wholly

elastic. A librarian, at the turn of the century, would have on his shelves at one moment Clara Reeve in one volume, Mrs. Bennett in seven, Mrs. Radcliffe in anything from one to four, and the Misses Cuthbertson in five or six. He would also have copies of earlier, more famous, fictions in volumes still more numerous. But many of these offer no fair analogy. They were originally serial, and not simultaneous issues at all, their authors having added another volume or pair of volumes after a short interval, when the success of the earlier section warranted the venture.

In the succeeding period things became simpler. Between 1820 and 1830 the novel in three post 8vo. volumes became more or less regularized. The price per volume was standardized at half a guinea, and even lengths became approximately predictable. Over the fifty odd years of the three-volume novel period, part-issue fiction ran to about 330,000 words, and the length of the average three-decker remained round about 200,000 words, with a sharp tendency to greater brevity during the final decade of the period.

With so high an average, "long novels" were naturally few enough; and those which greatly exceeded the normal must, like their eighteenth-century predecessors already men-

tioned, be disqualified from the present competition, because they first appeared in monthly numbers and ranked rather as periodical than as book issues. The search, therefore, for "long novels" cannot profitably begin before the coming of the one-volume novel epoch. In what quantities have such novels since then appeared? Is there indeed any reason to attribute the frequency of recent issues of the kind to change of taste either in writers or in public?

The last question cannot be answered without considering the second complication in the way of easy generalization on this "long novel" theme—namely, the influence of book-marketing technique on what may be termed the literature of entertainment. The three-volume novel was killed by a revolt of circulating librarians and public against a price-level and format which had ceased to correspond to the needs of the time. Life had become too busy for the leisured reading of the past; a public growing accustomed to rapid travel, and tending more and more to live in flats and small houses, would not burden itself with three volumes of a single story. From another direction came intense competition from magazines and cheap editions, which, in greater numbers than ever before, pressed in upon the

three-decker, seeking to overwhelm it. Under the triple weight of public dislike, library-boycott and cheap mass production, the unwieldy survivor of a more spacious age sank out of sight, and the one-volume novel at six shillings took its place. Simultaneously, and automatically, fiction was compressed to about two-thirds of its former length.

Now observe, if you please, that this establishment of the shorter average novel during the 1890's was not directly due to any public demand for shorter novels. It was due to a change of technical procedure, brought about by a public demand for greater cheapness and greater convenience. In other words, the novel as a literary form was at this date transmogrified by new conditions and conventions in publishing and book-distribution. Naturally the highly art-conscious novelists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were not aware that they were writing short at the bidding of trade organization. It happened that under French influence the short psycho-analytical novel had recently become an intellectual fashion; so that for a while opportunism and æsthetic mode went in sweet harmony. But before very long certain novelists began to chafe against a limit of 100,000 words; and, finding publishers un-

sympathetic toward any alteration in the one-volume habit, were compelled to disguise their prolixity by dividing what was really one book into two or three or even more. Rolland's *Jean Christophe* was very influential in encouraging English novelists to essay instalment-fiction on a protracted scale, and during the years immediately preceding the War several such series-novels were published.[1] Simultaneously there appeared a few—a very few—long novels in one volume (de Morgan's *Joseph Vance* was the outstanding example), but publishers viewed such experiments so unfavourably that they were never more than exceptional.

The effect of the War on novel-writing was to establish more firmly than ever a material and technical despotism. The shortage and high price of paper and strawboard made even the 80–100,000 word novel a difficult publishing problem, so that the demand for still shorter fiction became urgent. It was typical of British commercial conservatism that there was not at this juncture an instinctive revolt against the convention of the single-priced and cloth-

[1] E.g. J. D. Beresford's *Jacob Stahl* series; Compton Mackenzie's *Sinister Street*; Arnold Bennett's *Clayhanger* series; Oliver Onions' murder trilogy; Dorothy Richardson's saga of Miriam; Galsworthy's opening chronicles of the Forsyte family.

bound novel. France and Germany priced their wrappered fiction according to content and format; England, in the hallowed name of practical convenience, tried to persist in issuing novels in cloth-boards, in uniform size and at a uniform price. The result had a certain irony. Publishers, booksellers, and librarians clung to a traditional method until circumstances literally forced them to alter at least half of it; and in so doing they missed an opportunity. By forestalling necessity and grading novel issues for themselves, they might have earned public gratitude; as it was, they merely added to their traditional unpopularity by waiting until they were pushed, and then rather shamefacedly demanded 8*s.* 6*d.* or even 9*s.* for fiction of four-and-sixpenny length and appearance.

Nevertheless it is an ill wind . . . In breaking the standard price for fiction under *force majeure*, the trade succeeded in opening the door (and their own eyes) to one of the possibilities they had hitherto stubbornly opposed. Thanks to the nine-shilling novel of the famine years, Dreiser and Priestley can to-day appear at 10*s.* and 10*s.* 6*d.*; Maurice Baring, Brett Young, Powys and others at 15*s.*; and the disguised long novels of an earlier time can now assume "omnibus" shape—as, of

course, they should rightly have done twenty years ago.

II

Mr. Priestley's novel *The Good Companions* and Mr. Powys' novel *Wolf Solent* each contain as nearly 280,000 words as makes no matter. This is about three times the length of the average seven-and-sixpenny novel of to-day; about a third as long again as the average three-volume novel of the period 1830–1880; and shorter by from one-fifth to one-quarter than the famous part-issue novels of Dickens, Ainsworth, Thackeray, Lever and Trollope, which satisfied the serial longings of the novel-readers from 1840 to 1865. But if these two modern novels are oddly similar in length, they resemble each other in nothing else whatsoever. The former is an up-to-date exercise in the traditional objective manner, a deliberate reversion to an earlier type alike of novel-structure and of characterization; the latter is wholly modern, a sort of orchestrated Dreiser novel, with strong affiliations to D. H. Lawrence.

It will be obvious to any reader of *The Good Companions* who does not happen to know it already, that Mr. Priestley is a student of literature and has read more of the fiction of the past than most men of his time. His book

is not only an unmistakable revival of an old form but in places flatters almost too sincerely its famous predecessors. It will further be obvious that, although he is a Yorkshireman and, as such, prides himself on a sense of reality and no-bloody-nonsense, he has ideas as to the need in modern fiction for a little more charity and a little less prying into the latrines of life. Finally, it will be obvious that, whereas the main qualities needed in a novelist who sets out to do what he has done are inventiveness and high spirits and then more inventiveness, he—J. B. Priestley—must be a cheerful being of fertile mind, for a more unflagging, dexterous, friendly and therefore readable book has not happened for long enough.

But a novel born of a marriage between purposeful archaism and instinctive geniality cannot expect to make friends with every one. With the majority perhaps; but not with every one. *The Good Companions* will be popular with those who like clean, cheerful fiction, a rapid crowded story, pleasant touches of actuality and a happy ending; and also with those who either do not know Dickens well enough, or love him too well, to mind a rather wholesale resurrection of his types and tricks. Others, however—comparatively few, but fierce and articulate—will resent the deter-

mined optimism of a story which in itself offers at least equal scope for pessimism; will want to know more of the real characters of the protagonists than their inventor tells; and may, according to temperament, dislike or suspect the asides to the reader and the knowing hints of dramatic developments yet to come, which the author, in pursuit of his revivalist ambition, has not scrupled to borrow from the novels of an earlier age.

But, fortunately, the hostility of those out of sympathy with his experiment will not greatly worry Mr. Priestley. He is far too conscious of what he is doing not to anticipate the charges of sentimentality, of superficial humour, of careful administration of doses of pathos, which will be brought against him. He knows *The Good Companions* to be sentimental; he meant it to be. And why not? To which there is no convincing reply. He knows there to be patches of knock-about, of type-humour such as Smollett and Marryat and Hook and Dickens used gaily and with admirable effect. He likes knock-about. And why not? As for pathos—in such a technique as he has chosen, the simple gaiety demands a simple sadness to balance it, a chuckle and a lump in the throat must alternate inevitably.. And once again, why not?

"In England," says Mr. Priestley, about two-thirds of the way through his book, "if one turns realist, the other turns idealist; a cynic instantly creates a sentimentalist." This is in effect the clue to the intention and to the achievement of *The Good Companions*. Weary of realism and cynicism (or, maybe, guessing that a large number of novel-readers are on the point of becoming thus weary), he offers idealism and sentimentalism. It is the familiar process of forestalling a general reaction in taste by getting there first. Walpole did it with *The Castle of Otranto*; Bulwer did it—not once, but several times—with *Paul Clifford*, with *Night and Morning*, with *The Caxtons*. There have been other examples in more recent times. The writers who have successfully contrived this difficult manœuvre have always been persons of great intelligence and have won a large contemporary public, but they would have been better novelists had their novels been less consciously a virtuosity.

In this, at any rate, Mr. Priestley has gone one better. If it is something of a *tour de force* to have re-written *Nicholas Nickleby* from a triple instead of a single point of view, to have made a new survey of England for the purpose, and then to have produced the whole in modern dress, the book itself is wholly free from

virtuosity. No mere virtuoso would so happily jog-trot about the country with his puppets, as Mr. Priestley with the members of his Concert Party ; he would inevitably over-dramatize, or pay tribute to his own ingenuity by underlining certain points in his technique. There is nothing of this in *The Good Companions*. It is written with disarming cordiality ; its observation is shrewd and industrious ; its whole atmosphere unassuming. Indeed, except when Jess Oakroyd (the elderly carpenter from Bruddersford and a vehicle for all Mr. Priestley's love and understanding of his fellow Yorkshiremen) holds the stage, the comedy is so controlled as to be almost too level. Only now and again when the author's private enthusiasms or special hatreds—for the industrial landscape and working folk of the West Riding ; for pubs and their small-talk ; for a really satisfying rough-house ; for (conversely) an Oxford accent—jar him from his equable normality, does his manner exceed the limits of the gruff but twinkling solemnity proper to the top-deck of a Leeds tram crowded with home-going men. But within those limits, he is staunch and shrewd and humorous—three qualities as valuable in a story-teller as they are rare.

The Good Companions owes its structure to a

picaresque tradition almost classical; it owes certain passages of style and several of its characters to Dickens; it owes its charity and good humour to an author gleefully in reaction from a disillusionment too long the fashion among novelists. And to all three of these inspirations is due its abnormal length. The picaresque novel, which tells of the queer types and quaint adventures encountered by one individual or by a group of individuals who go a-wandering about the countryside, must of necessity be long and desultory. Dickens is longest when at his most obviously picaresque. Finally, just as Mr. Priestley is out to challenge a still modish cynicism, so he is also out to challenge the scrupulous economy of words with which that cynicism is most readily expressed.

It is a refreshing doctrine; and as an evangelist Mr. Priestley is unassailable. Nevertheless, he will write better novels than *The Good Companions*. A long book should surely be solid. Yet there are places in *The Good Companions* where solidity is sacrificed to a determination to be long. It is certainly a relief to get away from the strangled perverseness of much advanced fiction. But the drawback of the Great Empty Spaces is apt to be their emptiness; and there are moments

during the consumption of *The Good Companions* when one would like rather more butter for so large a piece of bread.

III

The Good Companions, then, although it could not be shorter and still preserve its essential character, might in several places, and with advantage, be richer and fuller. *Wolf Solent*, on the other hand, is at times overrich. Loaded with elaborate analysis of mood, with scruple and counter-scruple, not only is the book a little longer than it really need have been, but Mr. Powys risks obscuring the amazing beauty of his country-sense and his unerring judgment of the secret vagaries—sexual and otherwise—of his characters, by a too ready indulgence in the abstractions of an occasionally turgid philosophy.

But when this is said, there remains little to say of *Wolf Solent* but what is in the highest degree respectful of a book profoundly true, gemmed with triumphant simile, and—in the matter of descriptions of country scenes and sounds and smells—almost distractingly beautiful.

A man in his middle thirties, Wolf Solent, after ten years of history-teaching in a London School, quite suddenly breaks out in fierce

invective against the world in which he and his pupils live. Dancing in the very teeth of the school authorities what he calls his "malice dance," he is sacked; but by a lucky chance secures the post of secretary to the eccentric Squire of King's Barton, a village near the Dorset town of Ramsgard, in whose famous Public School his father had years ago taught history also. Wolf's story, as related in Mr. Powys' six hundred odd pages, begins with his journey from London to Dorset, and ends about twelve months later, after a series of encounters and emotional experiences, all of which are described in great detail and with unfaltering subtlety.

Already in the train from Waterloo Wolf shows by his thoughts what manner of man he is: "I don't care whether I get fame. I don't care whether I leave any work behind me when I die. All I want is certain sensations." And sensations he undoubtedly achieves. Again, looking forward to the moment when he shall once again see the three church towers of Ramsgard, King's Barton and Blacksod, he thinks it quaint "that I've absolutely no idea what I shall be feeling, when I touch with my hand the masonry of those three towers." That is intensely Wolf. Never was man (or, maybe, never was novelist) endowed with a

keener sense of touch than Wolf (or his creator). Rough tree-trunks, a wall-top, notches in a stick, the satin firmness of a girl's breast—any one of these can set his pulses racing. Thus self-revealed, with brief explanation of his favourite trick of sinking into his own soul in order to thrill his nerves by secret hatred of the world, Wolf arrives at Ramsgard. From that moment, and step by step, he is absorbed into the bizarre society of a Dorset countryside.

It has been complained of *Wolf Solent* that all the characters in the novel are abnormal, and most of them either bestial or corrupt. This typically British criticism ignores the idea which is the basis of Mr. Powys' method—or at least of his method as I understand it. In the early days of Post-Impressionist painting, apologists for the new school tried to explain that when an artist set out to paint a tree, he could either paint something externally and universally recognizable *as* a tree—a two-dimensional conglomeration of leaves and branches—or he could strive to express that essential quality in a tree which, visual detail apart, identified it as a tree and as nothing else. The latter aim was the aim of the new art, and it was sometimes described as trying to paint the "treeness" of the tree. Post-Impressionism has become Expressionism; but there

remains this fundamental difference between its attitude toward the object painted and the traditional attitude of the realist painter. Mr. Powys is an expressionist in characterization ; not a realist. He knows that in nearly every human being the outward, visible man is something different from the spirit within. He knows that civilization and social custom, or shyness, or ambition, or desire, or any of half a dozen other impulses are for ever at work, urging us to disguise our real selves, for practical purposes, to seem what we are not. And he has set out to people his Dorset countryside with men and women whose secret, as well as whose public, characters are laid bare for the reader to see. Each of the principal personages in the story is, as it were, presented on two planes ; and their various dualities are made to criss-cross, to conflict, or to interlock, with an ingenuity and a sureness of adjustment which are beyond criticism.

Squire Urquhart and the " automatic " young woman from the " Farmers' Rest " are at heart both perverts ; wherefore we see them, now as they really are, now under their respective guises of eccentric antiquarian and dutiful great niece. Malakite, the second-hand bookseller, has had a child by his own daughter ; but beneath the evil fame of his incestuousness,

he is just a frightened and pathetic old man. T. E. Valley, the tragic shabby little parson of King's Barton, is to the world a squalid drunkard—a piece of contemptible flotsam washed by poverty and lack of character into this stagnant creek. But underneath, Valley has faith such as martyrs have; and Mr. Powys shows that, by this deep-down conviction of the sacredness of his office, even an object thus forsaken and wretched can be ennobled. Wolf's mother is no less dual-natured than the rest. Outwardly she is a flippant clever woman, to whom little is serious, who meets the personal conflicts and awkwardnesses of life with a gay bravado, to whom her son is a helpless fumbler to be alternately mothered and mocked. But in her secret soul she is consumed with angry bitterness against the long-dead husband who, with his selfish defiant hedonism, brutalized her trust and wrecked her life. "Your father thought me a hard, selfish, conventional woman without an idea in her head," she says to Wolf. "I can never forgive your father for destroying our life." "What's the use of his sort of folly? What's the use of tilting against conventions? It's more amusing to play with those things."

As for Wolf himself—his is, not surprisingly, the most elaborate portrait in the book—he is a

type much commoner in modern masculine psychology than may be readily admitted. A creature of quivering nerves, all terror and desire, he is sex-ridden, yet happiest in peaceful comradeship with other men ; lusting after women, yet hating them ; self-distrustful, yet arrogant ; a hotchpotch of pride and shame and diffidence and industrious, rather pitiful, simplicity. His relations with the various women in the book give Mr. Powys opportunity for perceptive definitions and verbal felicity which, without exaggeration, amount to genius. Wolf and his mother ; Wolf and the lovely Gerda, for desire of whose body he makes the wistful gesture of a marriage doomed to dislocation ; Wolf and Christie, who represents the feminine and non-female ideal of woman, of which such men as Wolf will always dream, who remains that wraithlike being, until the man himself shatters his own vision by forcing her femaleness upon her ; Wolf and Selena Gault, the tragic ex-mistress of his father, with her deformed lip and her superb unselfishness ; Wolf and his half-sister ; Wolf and the child-woman Olwen—in conflict, in passion, in pity, in anger, in anything but contentment, these encounters come and go and come again. And the man himself swings continually between the flesh and the spirit. Christie's

slenderness and remote fragrance, the strap of her shoe over her frail instep, uplift Wolf to a romantic adoration. But the male-animal in him can, on the same day and without insincerity in either mood, undress his lovely Gerda by the kitchen stove, and thrill to watch the firelight kindle and dim her nakedness. Then, in a moment of later bitterness, even conversation with women becomes horrible :

> It is impossible to talk of any woman to another woman without betraying the absent one. They must have blood. Every word you speak is a betrayal. They're not satisfied otherwise.

Again later, and the bitterness turns in on himself. It is his sensuality, all men's sensuality, which tarnishes the patient landscape of rain-drenched fields, the wide serenity of Nature. " If the world could be washed clean," he cries, " of mammals and their furtive indecencies ! " But if it were, he would be more miserable still. And knows it.

In the dynasty of the long novel *Wolf Solent* has been given a Dreiser parentage. This is because *An American Tragedy* is built on similar lines, and Mr. Dreiser's scrutiny of Clyde Griffiths has much of the melancholy despair with which Mr. Powys surveys his fancy's children. But, structure and *stimmung*

apart, the two books are very different. *Wolf Solent* is saturated with the beauty of landscape and of weather. Colours, smells, the feel of dock-leaves crushed beneath the foot, the hot silence of intricate high-hedged lanes, the nonchalant outskirts of a little town—every facet and phase of country life in lush south-western England is treasured in Mr. Powys' adoring memory; is then, with a sort of sensuous disgust, deliberately besmirched by the men and women of his imagination.

It is this aspect of his impressive book which suggests the thought of D. H. Lawrence; and behind Lawrence of an earlier book, too little famed. *Furze the Cruel* by John Trevena rivals *Wolf Solent* in passionate yet ecstatic protest against the violation of natural loveliness by human frailty. It would be fitting for these two books to stand side by side upon the shelf, and—flanking them—*The White Peacock*, *Sons and Lovers*, perhaps *Lady Chatterley* also. . . .

IV

And how, in the light of all this—in view of the publishing history of the past, the publishing conditions of the present, and the character of the two most recent examples of the genre—shall the prospects of the long novel be adjudged?

Inasmuch as during the mid-Victorian epoch all (or nearly all) novels were long; inasmuch as, since that epoch and until the last few years, the long novel has hardly had a chance to reveal itself, it is natural that the present day should get the credit for establishing profuse fiction as a definite type of literary activity. But whether over a period of time the actual output of really long novels will prove to be greater than at any other time, is doubtful. Good novels are as long as they are; and although both Mr. Priestley and Mr. Powys have shown that there are themes which cannot be treated otherwise than in chronicle or cumulative form, there are equally themes for which extended treatment is impossible.

Wherefore, after perhaps a brief inflation period (caused by the possibility of publishing at great length having gone to authors' heads), we may anticipate that matters will continue very much as before. There is no reason why novelists should deliberately write to much greater length than their topic requires. Indeed there is reason to the contrary. Economic sense (normally well developed among modern story-tellers) will persuade authors to spend their time over two ordinary novels rather than one very long one, to reap a double harvest rather than a harvest and a half.

For that, taking into account the time spent in writing and the relative earning probabilities of the two alternatives, is roughly how the problem will present itself.

"OLIVER TWIST"

By Arthur Symons

SWINBURNE was a great praiser of great work, as he admits in his *Notes on Poems and Ballads* (1868):

> I have never been able to see what should attract men to the profession of criticism but the mere pleasure of praising.

He was the only critic of his time who rarely, if ever, by design or accident, praised the wrong things. Only, when I read his article on Charles Dickens, I failed to fathom what seemed to me the enormity of his praise.

> England, under the reign of Dickens, had other great names to boast of which may well be allowed to challenge the sovereignty of his genius. But as there certainly was no Shakespeare and no Hugo to eclipse and rival his glory, he will probably and naturally always be accepted and acclaimed as the greatest Englishman of his generation. In *Oliver Twist* the quality of a great, comic and tragic poet or dramatist in prose fiction was for the first time combined with the already famous qualities of a great humorist and a born master in the arts of narrative and dialogue.

There was certainly no vestige of a poet in Dickens. But I agree with what Swinburne says of *Oliver Twist*, which is a cruel and pitiless masterpiece full of tragic irony and sinister humour. And there is something in it which reminds me of Defoe, whose inhuman or at least insensitive genius begot Robinson Crusoe on Moll Flanders. The modern English novel begins with that elaborate masterpiece *Tom Jones* of Fielding. It contains the whole of his genius and besides this the typically wicked woman Lady Bellaston who is painted as Hogarth might have painted her. The hero is the base-born, selfish, sullen, virile and adventurous youth, who is passionate and a man of honour. Blifil is essentially the basely villainous creature who spins much of the plot: and that scandalous scene in which he is discovered is purely comic. In any case Partridge is lunar beside the noontide glory of Micawber; and yet, when one considers the question of Dickens, he seems incorrigibly ignorant as a social satirist. And when such characters as Thackeray's Lady Kew come to one's mind, one's imagination seizes upon Valérie Marneffe, who is far and away the greatest creation of any woman in the whole of fiction: venomous, a ravenous reptile and a menace, she has some of the qualities of

Shakespeare's Cleopatra. We have only to say "Cleopatra" and the woman is before us. We have only to say "Valérie" and the woman surges before us. Only, as far as I am acquainted with the works of Dickens, I cannot recall any of his women who are creations in the tragical sense of the word. Where he excels is simply when he makes them at once ludicrous and repulsive, and essentially comic, in the highest sense of the word, as in his literally insurpassable Mrs. Gamp—an absolute triumph of dramatic humour—and in his malignant Miss Miggs and in his infamous Mrs. Prig.

Swinburne was right in saying:

> From Quilp's Wharf to Plashwater Weir Mill Lock, the river belongs to Dickens by right of conquest or creation. The part it plays in more than a few books is indivisible from the parts played by human actors beside it or upon it.

The Thames is so wonderful because the mist is always changing its shapes and colours. If you come on it by night, and it is never wise to enter any city except by night, you are slowly swallowed up by a blank of darkness, pierced by holes and windows of light; foul and misty eyes of light in the sky; narrow gulfs, in which lights blink; blocks and spikes of black against grey; masts, as it were, rising

out of a sea of mist; then a whole street suddenly laid bare in bright light; shoulders of dark buildings; and then black shining rails, and then the river, a vast smudge, dismal and tragic. The Embankment curves towards the Cleopatra's Needle: you see the curve of the wall, as well as the lamps light it, leaving the obelisk in shadow, and falling faintly on the grey mud in the river; just that corner has a mysterious air, as if secluded, in the heart of a pageant: I know not what makes it quite so melancholy and tragic.

Poe wrote:

> Charles Dickens, in a note now lying before me, alluding to an examination I once made of the mechanism of *Barnaby Rudge*, says 'By the way, are you aware that Godwin wrote *Caleb Williams* backwards? He first involved his heroes in a web of difficulties, forming the second volume, and then, for the first, cast about for some mode of accounting for what had been done.'

Dickens always involved his characters in just such a web; but he never adopted Poe's method.

> Two things are invariably required—first, some amount of complexity, or, more properly, adaptation; and secondly, some amount of suggestiveness—some undercurrent, however indefinite in meaning.

In the transport of prose, something holds

us to the ground, and that is why substance is of so much greater importance in prose than in verse. In prose we can almost think in words. Art in verse, being supremely an art, begins by transforming. Prose fiction transforms, it is true, it cannot help transforming; but by its nature it is able to follow line for line in a way verse can never do. Poe wrote:

> One writer of the prose story may bring to his theme a vast variety of modes or inflexions of thought and expression (the ratiocinative, for example, the sarcastic or humorous) which are not only antagonistic to the nature of the poem, but absolutely forbidden by one of its most peculiar and indispensable adjuncts: we allude, of course, to rhythm.

Rhythm, such as it is, in Dickens, varies incredibly. But, for instance, in the words of Nancy, that superb creation of a depraved girl who has the passion of her sex but no respect for her body, who is the slave of Bill Sikes, the blood speaks—indeed in nearly all of her speeches—and makes one's blood curdle.

> Horrible thoughts of death, and shrouds with blood upon them, and a fear that has made me burn as if I were on fire, have been upon me all day. I was reading a book to-night to while the time away, and the same things came into the print. No imagination. I'll swear I saw 'coffin' written on every page of the book in large black letters.

And, again, when Fagin is in his cell.

Dawn was dawning when they again emerged. A great multitude had already assembled; the windows were filled with people smoking and playing cards to beguile the time; the crowd were pushing, quarrelling, and joking. Everything told of life and animation, but one dark cluster of objects in the very centre of all—the black stage, the cross-beam, and all the hideous apparatus of death.

The effect of passages like these and an immense amount of chapters is indeed tremendous: there are times when one holds one's breath in suspense. What I have quoted reminds me of Villiers de Lisle-Adam's *Ce Mahoin.*

Or, devant cette quantité de têtes, qu'éclarait le brouillard en feu et qui guettaient le tomber de la sienne, les yeux du patient s'agrandirent:—en une grave silence, affolé peut-être, il considera dans les airs d'alentour, en frissonant, cette mouvante assemblée incorporelle de faces sinistres,—avec une stupeur telle *qu'il fut décapité bouche béante.*

Dickens never created a single love-scene. This might seem inconceivable, but it is not so. Every great novelist with this exception has created wonderful and tragic and passionate love-scenes. Balzac, Flaubert, Hardy, Meredith, Fielding, Stendhal, Cervantes, D'Annunzio, Tolstoi, Hawthorne, Villiers, Barbey D'Aurevilly, created these scenes consum-

mately. Think of Emma Bovary, invented cruelly, marvellously, morbidly, in whom one finds, as Baudelaire says, the adulterous woman with a depraved imagination.

Elle se donna, magnifiquement, généreusement, d'une manière toute masculine à ses drôles qui ne sont pas ses égaux, exactement commes les poètes se livrent à des drôlesses.

Meredith created women in whom a capricious intellectual life burns with a bright but wavering flame. Of their inner life we know nothing: yet they have for me an inexplicable fascination. Think of some passionate love-scene, one of Emilia's in *Emilia in England*; or the Venetian episode in *Beauchamp's Career*: or the fiery race of events, where dawn and darkness meet, in *Rhoda Fleming*; and all of them, you will see, have more of the qualities of poetry than of prose. Meredith holds us by the living intensity of that vision of his of a world which is not our world, by the energy of genius which has done so much to achieve the Impossible. There is almost no passion in Hardy's work, and yet he sees all that is irresponsible for good and evil in a woman's character, all that is unreliable in her will and brain, all that is alluring in her variability. And of all this no trace in the whole work of Dickens.

And he is almost utterly deficient in the faculty of reasoning; he rarely reflects, and if he does reflect I find a kind of confusion or illusion in his reflections; and yet his sagacity is amazing and the amount of detail he engages in is literally incredible, most of all when he fixes that vivid vision of his on certain particular, peculiar, singular, sinister and sensational traits of those figures he is in the act of inventing, almost as endless as some sluggish river that flows everlastingly. Abnormal, certainly, and vile and monstrous, malignant and malevolent, these inimitable caricatures of actual life become almost more amazing than life itself.

And yet when it comes to the question of his humour I am at one with Swinburne in at least this sentence:

> Much, though certainly not all, of the humour is of the poorest kind possible to Dickens; and the reiterated repetition of comic catchwords and tragic illustrations of character is such as to affect the nerves no less than the intelligence of the reader with irrepressible irritation.

The humour of Mr. Pickwick is peculiar—for he has no originality and yet he talks and acts apparently after the method of his teacher; and the humour attributed to him consists in treating as a moral agent a being who is not

a moral agent. Not for one moment is Sam Weller comparable with such immortal creations as the Panurge of Rabelais, the Falstaff of Shakespeare and his Thersites, and Homais who is so inimitably comic in *Madame Bovary*. I quote Flaubert.

Une dernière reflexion qui termine. Rabelais n'a sondé que la société telle qu'elle pouvait être de son temps. Il a dénoncé des abus, des ridicules, des crimes, et, que sais-je, entrevu peut-être un monde politique meilleur, une société toute autre. Ce qui existait de lui faisait pitié, et, pour employer une expression triviale, *le monde était farce*. Et il l'a tourné en farce.

And, says Flaubert:

in all this headlong race to the abyss what dominates and shines and resounds is an eternal and immense and confused and gigantic laughter; monks, soldiers, bishops, kings, Popes, Cardinals, all pass before this colossal sarcasm of Rabelais, who flagelates and stigmatizes them, and they surge from underneath his pen bleeding and mutilated. Suddenly this Rabelais writes a book, without form or construction, with no premeditated plan, nor fixed idea, but full of biting and cruel railleries against the Lord despite his army and against the priest despite his sanctity; against the Pope despite his Indulgences; all that had been respected for centuries, science and magic and glory and fame and ideas and beliefs, all these are cast down, humanity despoiled of its fashionable robes and its deceptive laces; it shivers naked under the impure breath of

the Grotesque which oppresses it, and Panurge throws at its head barrels of wine and begins to laugh.

I have before me twenty volumes of Bentley's *Miscellany*, from 1837 to 1848. The first of them were edited by Dickens. They contain *Oliver Twist* as it originally appeared, with the illustrations of George Cruikshank, an artist whose genius I have always admired : a sinister and singularly original genius. In their complexity of passion and effectiveness of execution they attain tragic power ; and in these he introduces amazing effects of chiaroscuro. In some of his stupendous designs he reminds me of Méryon and Daumier. There is an immense vitality in all his figures, abject or caricatural, deformed or transformed, heroic, wonderful, sordid, bestial. There is a violence and vehemence in his vision, which, when it creates nightmares, spreads a feeling of intense horror over some close and poisonous atmosphere. His genius is essentially dramatic ; his style is grand and elemental, his matter at times trivial ; his effect is the angry assault of that drawing on that matter : his work shows a prodigious prodigality of means, and an abnormality in which he is in unison with Hogarth and Goya and Callot.

Concerned as Dickens almost always is with the lowest classes, with crimes and assassina-

tions and squalor and dirt and criminals and their victims and to a certain extent with the middle classes, there is something in his attitude towards this subject and those characters which indicates a kind of purity in the man himself, and at the same time a sense which is extraordinary of the fascination which one derives from these vile beings one has come across, as I have, chiefly in Paris, and from their own narratives, such as those of Lacenaire —*Mémoires, Révélations et Poèsies de Lacenaire* (1863); *Lacenaire Après Sa Condemnation* (1836), which I have before me. His confessions give one an uneasy thrill, a thrill of suspense and horror; he had a diabolical genius for assassinations, and he intoxicated himself with his own perversities, and with those of David Haggart: *The Life of David Haggart written by Himself under Sentence of Death* (1821), which is a criminal's confession, a veritable Thief's Calendar. He comes into Borrow's *Lavengro*—he who had saved Borrow's life was executed in 1821; it was not likely he could pretend to be worse than he was, yet he heightens the key of his crimes, working them up to a pitch of splendid ferocity from a malevolence rather mean than masterful.

Few novelists have neglected this most

sinister of all subjects. From the modern Iago who is Balzac's Vautrin, down to Huysmans and the Goncourts, not excluding Zola, these creations stand out from the lesser or it might be from the greater ones. In regard to the homicidal instinct, this phrase of Zola's might be applied to Sikes, and to Rogue Riderhood who reeks and who skulks into sight.

> Puisqu'il ne les connaissait pas, quelle fureur pouvait-il avoir contre elles ? Car, chaque fois, c'était comme une soudaine crise, de rage aveugle, une soif toujours renaissante de venger des offences très anciennes, dont il aurait perdu l'exacte mémoire. Cela venait-il donc de si loin, du mal que les femmes avaient fait de sa race, de la rancune amassée de mâle en mâle, depuis la première tromperie au fond des cavernes ?

Oliver Twist deals almost entirely with this subject, which is the province of Dickens; with thieves, house-breakers, murderers, villains, and in fact with criminals of the deepest dye, from the cringing and cruel and miserly and atrociously vile Jew Fagin, whose ignominious life, in which there is no redeeming quality, ends, after the committal of many crimes, in a prison-cell and then on the scaffold; to Bill Sikes, the personification of everything that is evil, debased, insanely cruel, heartless, an absolute gutter-snipe, whose murder of

poor, passionate and debased and degraded and devoted Nancy, is one of the most fiendish murders ever executed—together with that intolerable horror of the spilt blood of that girl who had not betrayed him. The scent of blood to the Elizabethan Dramatists was even worse than that when one hears blood drop—as in that terrible story of Balzac, *L'Auberge Rouge*, where Taillefer commits a fearful crime, himself seeing the blood of the dead man drip from the ceiling over his head, the taste of that spilt blood steaming at times up his nostrils. Sikes' shameful slaughter of his mistress drives him onward in the vain endeavour to escape from himself and from his victim; he wanders in some kind of blind circle—like Byron's "scorpion ringed with fire"—haunted intolerably by the eyes of Nancy, that persistently stare at him out of the darkness, that will not leave him alone. This situation is just as overwhelming as the next one where Sikes finds refuge in a strongly defended abode on Jacob's Island, inhabited by some of his confederates; suddenly into all the streets, across the bridges, surge howling multitudes; and of all the terrific yells that ever burst forth none could exceed the cry of that infuriated throng. Sikes gets on the roof, fastens one end of a rope against the

stack of chimneys, makes a running loop with the other end of the rope—

> At the very instant when he brought the loop over his head, previous to slipping it behind his armpits, at that very instant the murderer looking behind him, threw his arms above his head, and uttered a yell of horror. 'The eyes again,' he cried in an unearthly screech. Staggering as if struck by lightning, he lost his balance and stumbled over the parapet; the noose was at his back; it rose, ran up with his weight tight as a bow string, and swift as an arrow it sped. He fell five and thirty yards. There was a sudden jerk, a terrific convulsion of the limbs, and he hung, there, with the open knife clenched in his stiffening hand.

This terrible death scene reminds me of a similar one in Conrad's *An Outpost of Progress*:

> His toes were only a couple of inches above the ground; his arms hung stiffly down; he seemed to be standing rigidly at attention, but with one purple cheek playfully posed on the shoulder. And, irreverently, he was putting out a swollen tongue at his Managing Director.

These lurid creatures of Dickens, gifted with I know not how many abominable vices, are so cunning, so wary, and withal so confraternal a gang of thieves, who commit their crimes as it were from hand to hand, and are so chary of betraying one another—knowing what death might befall such traitors—who are in mortal fear of being found out: these are stamped

and branded, all of them with the same brand and stamp. Having tracked and trapped their victims, they in turn are inevitably tracked and trapped.

Sir Edmund Gosse writes wittily:

> Dickens builds up macrocosms swarming with human vitality, but not actuated by truly human instincts. In one of these vivaria we gaze, at his bidding, and see it teeming with movement; he puts a microscope into our hands, and we watch, with excited interest, the perfectly consistent, if often strangely violent and grotesque adventures of the beings comprised in the world of fancy. But real imitative vitality, such as the characters of Fielding and Jane Austen possess, the enchanting marionettes of Dickens never display: in all but their oddities, they are strangely incorporeal.

I have never felt assured if Jane Austen, who had such wonderful gifts in her creation —limited as it is—of living men and women, lovable and hateful, solemn and humorous, silly and disagreeable, with such extreme excellence in her dialogue, has in her prose any definite touch of genius. She is, at any rate, original, and her work lives in the same sense as that of George Sand and George Eliot, of Matilda Serao and Charlotte Brontë; who have, fortunately for them, fundamental and temperamental differences. Nor could I imagine anyone but Jane Austen writing:

> I could not sit seriously down to write a serious romance under any other motive than to save my life; and if it were indispensable for me to keep it up and never relax into laughing at myself, I am sure I should be hung before I had finished the first chapter.

And the reason is that the others were all endowed, with many differences, with the power of conceiving and of executing tragic conceptions. Jane Austen is unique in this: within her narrow range she lives, breathes, invents, adds quaintness and drollery to the passages she is revising; and that, in a word, there and in her own life, she is absolutely of her own age and period—yet curiously modern.

JAMES PAYN, 1830–98

By Leonard Huxley, LL.D.

AMONG the various centenaries which fall in this year, there is one especially which it is the pious duty of the *Cornhill* to commemorate. In the month of September, a hundred years ago, was born James Payn, a man whose gifts as novelist and essayist, as lover of letters and discriminating encourager of budding talent, found large scope during the thirteen years that he was editor of the *Cornhill*, and indeed, during the nine years before that, while he was Reader to the firm of Smith, Elder.

He had already won an assured position in the world of letters when, in his forty-fifth year, he was invited by George Smith, head of the firm and founder of the *Cornhill*, to take up the post of Reader. The offer came at a crucial moment in his career. For nearly seventeen years he had been editor of *Chambers' Journal*, the first year in conjunc-

tion with Leitch Ritchie, a prolific journalist now, perhaps, little more than the shadow of a name, and thereafter as sole editor, living at first in Edinburgh, and afterwards editing the magazine from London. He had formed a warm friendship with Robert Chambers; but after Robert's death, it was not such smooth sailing with his successor William Chambers, and Payn resigned in 1874. By a fortunate coincidence, Smith Williams, who had so long been Reader to Smith, Elder, and is still remembered for his sympathetic treatment of the unknown Charlotte Brontë, was now resigning. On the recommendation of Leslie Stephen, his old friend from Cambridge days, then editor of the *Cornhill*, Payn was appointed in Smith Williams' place.

Few men could have been better qualified for the task. Long years of editorial work had brought him into contact with many writers and made him adept at sifting good MSS. from bad. He already had some thirty-four books to his credit—poems, essays, collections of short stories, descriptive works and no less than twenty-two novels. It is said that *Lost Sir Massingberd*, which appeared in *Chambers' Journal* in 1864, raised the circulation by twenty thousand copies. Indeed, he seems to

have been born with the writer's gift; to vary Pope's lines:

> While yet a child, and still unknown to fame,
> He lisped in novels, for the novels came.

He was fonder of books and stories than of the field sports into which his father initiated him. Sent to a preparatory school at the age of seven, he won fame among his schoolfellows by his power of story-telling. At Eton, where perhaps the standard was higher, he was not so successful; an article he had written for a school magazine was rejected, and he was hurt. It is curious and interesting, by the way, that with all his linguistic powers he had no liking and no aptitude for the classics; though with the aid of a "crammer" he passed third into Woolwich. But he was not destined to become a soldier, even an R.E. The rigid discipline of the place, the coarse amusements of his fellows were not to his liking; after a year his health suffered; and he was withdrawn. After the Army, the Church. His father, the excellent Clerk to the Thames Commissioners, decided that he should take Orders, and sent him to a private tutor's in Devonshire to be prepared for Trinity, Cambridge. At his tutor's he found congenial surroundings in which his literary tastes flour-

ished. Not only did he get verses printed in various periodicals, but he paid off an old score and opened a new one with a description of life at the Woolwich Academy. This was published in *Household Words*. On the one hand it provoked a remonstrance from the Governor of the Academy; on the other it brought him into touch with Dickens, the editor of *Household Words*, an admired luminary into whose orbit he was to be drawn in person some years later.

Of these Cambridge days and the versatile charm which was natural to Payn, his contemporary Leslie Stephen wrote: "He had a unique position among his companions. He was no scholar in the Cambridge sense, and used language about Æschylus calculated to curdle the blood of a Greek professor. He was not a mathematician, though his remarkable talent for whist showed, I suppose, some talent of calculation; nor could he challenge the respect even then conceded to athletes. He preferred humorously to exaggerate his own muscular defects. He brought back from a reading party in the Lakes a pun which charmed him: 'The labour we delight in physics Payn,' said his mountaineering friends, and he accepted the phrase as a motto." Calverley was the mountaineer with the handy quotation.

The years at Cambridge were decisive. He took his degree, but did not take Orders. He did not become a preacher, though he did become President of the Union. His genius for friendship awoke; he made firm friends not only among his contemporaries, but with his dons, who encouraged his literary efforts, for he published two volumes of verse while still an undergraduate. His mind was made up; he turned to literature as a profession.

It was a bold plunge into life. Still more boldly, before he was fully twenty-four, he married—to his great happiness—Louisa Adelaide Edlin, to whom he had been engaged before he took his degree, and made his first home in the Lake District at Rydal Cottage, under the shadow of Nab Scar, at the very heart of the Wordsworth territory. Among his neighbours, over at Grasmere, was Harriet Martineau, to whom he had an introduction from Miss Mitford, an old friend of his father's. They were both literary "lions," and both helped him on his way with encouragement and advice during the four years he spent at Rydal, until, as has been said, he went to Edinburgh in 1858 to edit *Chambers' Journal.*

It was in 1874 that James Payn became Reader to Smith, Elder. This was not his first contact with the firm. He had long

wished to enter into what he called a "mutually beneficial" arrangement with these rising and vigorous publishers. In his Edinburgh days, and later again in the 'sixties, he proposed that they should publish novels of his. In the judgment of the firm, however, a novel which had already been published serially was not, as a rule, likely to succeed in the old three-volume form at 31*s.* 6*d.*, and the proposals were declined.

To begin with, Payn came to Waterloo Place for a short and agreed term, in order that he might see how the work suited him and that George Smith, for his part, might see how the firm liked his work. The experiment answered and their mutual relations were always most cordial; Payn continued his work as literary adviser for twenty-four years, and succeeded Leslie Stephen as editor of the *Cornhill* in 1883. Those who remember the old houses of Waterloo Place can picture him at work in the familiar second-floor room with his two windows looking out from between the big red columns of the façade upon the western side of the street. The third window on this floor belonged to a smaller room, once no doubt a dressing-room, which communicated with the larger room. This, too, had its literary associations, for here in old days a bed would be made up to accom-

modate Matthew Arnold when he was kept in town too late to get out to Harrow or Cobham. Later it was the working-room of the clerk who kept the *Cornhill* records and attended to the routine business of the magazine. Moreover, till the end of the firm's tenancy of the house, a visible reminder of Payn's occupancy hung over the mantelpiece in the larger room, —where, as it was said, "he smoked innumerable pipes and wrote innumerable novels"— a pen-and-ink sketch of Payn himself seated before his desk in the easy comfort of a dressing-gown, and turning round to face his visitor, with pen and pipe well in evidence.

As in his own work, so in that of others, he had a keen sense of construction and plot, of sound writing and good sense, and, what is not always to be found in a judge, a discriminating sense of humour which insisted on the acceptance of F. Anstey's *Vice Versa*, although George Smith himself confessed that he could discover no reason, in advance, why the book should be any great success. In this instance he was both courageous in his opinion and rewarded by immense success. But he did not, perhaps, carry big enough guns in the matter of insight and scholarship to sustain this kind of courage in backing his first impressions. Outside literature of the lighter order,

where his judgment was keen, he was liable to get out of his depth, and would be seized by doubts if George Smith, on the strength of his Reader's opinion of a MS., proposed a figure for its purchase, in his own view merely commensurate with that opinion, in Payn's second thought far too bold. Nevertheless, Payn was successful in "discovering" various authors of promise; let me name Henry Seton Merriman, and Conan Doyle and Stanley Weyman. Not only that, but he was generous in aiding beginners with his counsel and helping them to public recognition. As Stanley Weyman wrote, after Payn's death,

> I owed very much to the stimulus given me by Payn when he sat in that room of yours. Indeed but for his encouragement I doubt if I should have had the pluck to venture on any prolonged work. And I know that many others ought to say the same.

There is a delightful story about Payn and his adverse verdict on *John Inglesant* which cost the firm a great success. He was not alone in his opinion, for it may be remembered that the book was rejected by a whole string of publishers. Thereupon the author had fifty copies printed for himself and his friends. One copy he sent to Mr. Gladstone, as being likely to take interest in its political and religious

themes ; the review Gladstone wrote of it made a great stir, and Messrs. Macmillan, who had previously rejected the book, promptly made a good offer and took it up, with what result we know.

To Smith, Elder the book had come in a far from inviting way. It was sent by a Manchester bookseller, one of their country customers, with a half-apologetic request that it might be looked at, and a letter written which could be shown to the author. Obviously the bookseller had no great opinion of it, and said nothing to bias Payn in its favour. In any case, the book was not in Payn's line of country. He reported against it, and forgot all about it. Consequently, when the book was a flaring success, and it was reported in the papers that Smith, Elder had refused it when offered to them, he was furious. It was a reflection on his literary judgment, he told George Smith ; and he insisted on writing to contradict the false statement. With a certain change of names he tells in his *Literary Recollections* what happened—

> While upon the subject of publishers, I will narrate a story told me by one of that useful and innocuous class called "Readers." He was in the house of Paternoster, Row & Co., but (one cannot but think fortunately for him) Row was dead. One day my friend received one of those charming brochures so

common nowadays, full of ill-natured gossip about literature and its disciples. Among other disagreeable things, it said that the eminently successful work *Disloyala: or the Doubtful Priest*, which had run through fifty editions, had been rejected by his house some years ago. He showed this libel to his friend and employer, Mr. Paternoster.

"Is not this," he cried, "an infamous statement?"

"What *does* it matter?" was the quiet reply; "this sort of gentleman will say anything."

"But I really can't stand it," persisted the Reader. "It is a gross libel upon us both, but especially upon me; I shall write to the man and give him a piece of my mind."

"I wouldn't do that if I were you," said Mr. Paternoster, still more quietly than before.

"But why not? I really must——"

There was a twinkle in Mr. Paternoster's eye, and a smile at the extreme corners of his mouth, which attracted the other's attention, and interrupted his eloquence.

"Is there any reason why I should not contradict this man?"

"Well, yes; the fact is we did reject the book."

"What? Do you mean to say I rejected *Disloyala*?"

"I am afraid so; at all events we did it amongst us. I don't blame you; I think it even now a dullish book."

"And you never told me? Never let fall a word of it all these years?"

"Certainly not. I thought it might distress you. I should not have told you now, but that I was taken unawares."

This to my mind is one of the prettiest stories I have ever heard. I should like to see the General

who could be equally reticent, when the Chief of his Intelligence Department had omitted a precaution that would have secured him a victory; or the solicitor who had lost his cause through the neglect of his counsel; or the politician who had missed his point in the House through the shortcoming of his secretary. Yet Mr. Paternoster was a publisher, one of that fraternity who, if we are to believe some people, are incapable of a generosity. For my part (who have collected a considerable number of anecdotes of the human race) I have never heard a more creditable story, even of a Divine.

So wrote James Payn of his own lapse, the tribute of a generous man to his generous chief.

I cannot resist telling another story of his editorship, which has a humour of its own. His handwriting, owing to arthritis in the fingers, was execrable, rivalling in illegibility the bad pre-eminence of Dean Stanley's. The story goes that he once rejected an article, but the contributor brought forward his letter of rejection as proof of acceptance, and as Payn himself could not read it, he was constrained to accept the gentler interpretation. Whether this be strictly true or not, it gains support from the article on "Great Publishing Houses" in *T.P.'s Weekly* for October 25, 1912, wherein the writer vouches for having

seen such a letter accepting for the *Cornhill* the first short story of Mr. Cutcliffe Hyne. And certainly it was next to impossible to read it. As the

MS. did not accompany it, and as the story duly appeared, the interpretation cannot be challenged.

With Payn's assumption of the Editorship, a new experiment was made. To meet the competition of other magazines which contested the field with the *Cornhill*, it was reduced in size and issued at 6*d.* instead of 1*s.*, with a preponderance of fiction in its contents. But the experiment was not successful; the *Cornhill* aimed at maintaining its former standards: the sixpenny public looked for something else; and in the end the *Cornhill*, which had meanwhile given a start to a number of excellent writers, went back to its earlier price and form.

Of the sixty-nine works given under the name of James Payn, the vast majority were fiction. Of these four appeared serially in the *Cornhill*: *A Grape from a Thorn*, *The Burnt Million*, *The Talk of the Town* (the story of William Henry Ireland, the forger of Shakespeare manuscripts), and *The Disappearance of George Driffell*. *By Proxy*, 1878, was the most popular of his novels, clenching his reputation, and after all these years he still commands his share of readers, if one may judge casually by noting reprints of *Lost Sir Massingberd* and *Walter's Word* and *What He Cost Her*, to name no more, on the railway bookstalls. For he

could tell a story so that it went with a swing, straightforwardly and without trace of affectation. If he neither scaled the heights nor plumbed the depths of human feeling and human character, he was gifted with invention and a lively spirit ; he had an eye for cheerful comedy ; he could construct a good plot and weave ingenious situations, carrying his readers happily along with him, even if, as Leslie Stephen remarks, " his wicked heroes had a curious aptitude for getting wedged in hollow trees or starved at the bottom of Cornish mines." Underlying his tale " there was always the simple, bright, shrewd, generous Payn of real life." There was a breath, too, of his much admired Dickens in his manner of writing, but not with force enough to turn his characters into caricature, though as we look back to-day we may feel that they are perhaps a bit mannered in their ways and their mode of speech after what we suspect to be the conventional book-habit of the period.

Payn the novelist will hold a little niche of his own in literary history ; Payn the man of warm human contacts comes near to many hearts. In his conversation, as in his weekly causerie in the *Illustrated London News*, in his essays, and in his posthumous volume of memories, *The Backwater of Life*, so named

after his farewell essay in the *Cornhill*, there was a living and genial touch that charmed his readers and still more, his many friends, who remained singularly faithful to him through the years when he was crippled with arthritis.

It was his genius for friendship which accounted for so much of his influence upon the world of letters. His friends there were many, beginning with Charles Dickens and his literary circle of the 'fifties; to the last his "singularly *bright* geniality" continued to gain him new friends. Not even the constant pain and depression, due to increasing ill-health, served to spoil his flow of good stories and his *joie de vivre*, though he could exclaim, "Health, health, health—nothing else seems worth having to poor me." When his retirement was foreshadowed by his *Cornhill* essay "The Backwater of Life," the letters which poured in upon him from his old contributors, many of them, he was ashamed to confess, quite forgotten, touched him deeply. They, at least, had not forgotten his invariable kindness.

From 1894 onwards, Payn was more and more crippled by illness and confined to his house in Warrington Crescent. However, he steadily continued to read MSS. for the firm and to give practical advice from his long experience to the new partner, Reginald Smith,

who, no less than his father-in-law, the head of the house, became cordially attached to Payn.

Let me conclude with two scenes each in its own way characteristic of his earliest bent and his enduring friendship. From his undergraduate days he had been a brilliant whist player, and in London his favourite recreation was his daily rubber at his club. On one of these occasions he was partnered by W. E. Forster, who as Irish Secretary had received the offensive nickname of "Buckshot" from his orders that the police should use buckshot when firing to disperse a mob. Forster revoked: Payn was struck speechless, till Forster gently remarked—"If it will ease your feelings, call me Buckshot."

In later years, when he could no longer go down to the club, some of his fellow-members arranged to come twice a week and play whist with him at his home. Though his hands were so stiff that he could hardly deal, his skill was unimpaired, his enjoyment unlessened. He refused to let his unceasing sufferings spoil his friends' visits. With steadfast courage and unbending resolution he would rally his powers and greet them with jest and laughter though a moment before he had been racked with intolerable anguish,

His vivacity was so indomitable as occasionally to lead his friends to doubt for the moment whether his illness could be as serious as it really was. . . . One went to his house, not as one goes to cheer an invalid, but with the hope, rarely falsified, of receiving cheer from him.

So Leslie Stephen once more.

It was sunset; but the sun of friendship shone to the last.

ROBERT SMITH SURTEES

By Bonamy Dobrée

IN *Memoirs of a Foxhunting Man*, Mr. Sassoon's narrator, Sherston, describes how he and his friend Colwood "adopted and matured a specialized jargon drawn almost exclusively from characters in the novels of Surtees; since we knew these almost by heart, they provided us with something like a dialect of our own, and in our care-free moments we exchanged remarks in the mid-Victorian language of such character parts as Mr. Romford, Major Yammerton, and Sir Moses Mainchance, while Mr. Jorrocks was an all-pervading influence." Sherston was "the richest commoner in England," while Colwood would often declare that he would be "the death of a fi' pun note—dash my wig if I won't."

That this should be no unusual thing, that we should all have met people who dashed their wigs, or who, innocent of Beckford, quoted gloomily "Take not out your 'ounds on a werry windy day," is a tribute to Surtees;

and the reasons for the tribute are worth examining. It is not only, as Sherston declared, that their "adaptation of the Ringwell Hunt to the world created by that observant novelist was simplified by the fact that a large proportion of the Ringwell subscribers might have stepped straight out of his pages." That is partly the cause, but it will not take us very far in our search after the reason of the persistence of Surtees. There is, indeed, no single reason. If we take Surtees's writings as a hunting country and try to pursue the fox of his popularity through it, it is not at all certain that we shall make him "cry capevi." It is a large country, some of it fair and free enough, with no unjumpable fences: but some of it is woodland with, it must be confessed, not a few boggy rides, very like those in that "incorrigible mountain," that "unpardonable wilderness," Pinch-me-Near Forest. We shall often be in danger of changing foxes, and if we do not keep the pack of our ideas well in hand we may even riot after hare. It would be a woebegone critic who would have to confess himself in the end a mere currant-jelly man.

How impossible it is, thinking of Surtees, not to drop into his jargon; and there at once is another bit of the secret: it is by very vivid

if often repeated catch phrases that he imparts a certain kind of life to his characters. For these, with a few exceptions, are of the nature of "humours"; and "dash my vig!" is only a variant of swearing by Pharaoh's foot. The lively catch phrase and the "humour," these together account for a degree of vitality; for the humour, when skilfully enough contrived, constantly reminds us of people we know, if we happen to come into contact with the circles from which they were drawn. Those who are not lucky enough to hunt and meet the squire of Hawbuck Grange may yet meet Admiration Jack at whatever watering-place they idle away their health in; just as the traveller abroad must keep very much to himself if he does not run across Sir Politick Would-be. Not, of course, that Surtees's mind is as probing or as general as Jonson's, nor has he the same giant's capacity for creating his butts; in short, to compare them as writers would be ridiculous; but we shall not quite see what Surtees was after if we altogether forget the older comic traditions.

The object in writing is not to be confused with the impulse to write, at all events in a minor author like Surtees. His object, one need not question, was to give the average hawbuck something to read besides *Bell's Life*,

the local paper, and the Post Office Directory, which was the only literature, apparently, to be found in many houses. Himself a man of considerable reading, who could quote the poets, or rather misquote them with a happy familiarity, he did not see why even Soapey Sponge should have to spend an off day in reading nothing but *Mogg's Cab Fares*. His books, therefore, would have to be of the lightest, with nothing to strain the mind, or make more demands on the attention than a tired fox-hunter would be willing to give, or a disgruntled one cheated of a day with hounds by a black frost. Thus he boldly informed anyone who cared to read the preface to *Ask Mamma* :

> It may be a recommendation to the lover of light literature to be told that the following story does not involve the complication of a plot. It is a mere continuous narrative of an almost everyday exaggeration, interspersed with sporting scenes and excellent illustrations by Leech.

That is a fair description of all Surtees's novels, except that he is not, perhaps, quite fair to himself, since his stories have a certain structure ; they have a beginning and an end, even though the middle is elastic and episodic ; they are not just separate sketches like the *Jaunts and Jollities* ; they have, besides, a hero

of recognizable character or humour to bind the episodes together.

Surtees is not an author whom one reads for the sake of intimacy with a charming or profound personality, though the man is engaging enough. Of Durham stock, with certain intellectual pretensions (he was a cousin of the antiquary), and of hunting tastes, since he was a close relation of "that staunch fox-hunter, Mr. Surtees, of Mainsforth," praised by Nimrod, he was that agreeable thing, an intelligent country squire, no dull farm-bound hawbuck, but a friend and admirer of Thackeray, with his eyes well opened to what was going on around him. He realized what he might have been himself, for all his training in a solicitor's office, but for the railways which civilized the country by swift contact with London; and, Conservative though he was, thinking that life was as good as it well could be (if only the farmers would be more intelligent and take to draining their land), his only grudges against the railways were the gambling spirit they aroused in the early speculative days, and the decay of the turnpike roads which their coming brought about. Thus his impulse to write was a direct reaction to his delight in life; being pleased with it, he wanted to talk about it. And, having once started, it was difficult to stop.

> Writing, we imagine [he remarked in the apologia with which the fifteenth chapter of *Hawbuck Grange* opens], writing, we imagine, is something like snuffing or smoking—men get into the way of it, and can't well leave it off. Like smoking, it serves to beguile an idle hour. Individually speaking, writing makes us tolerably independent, both of the world and the weather. We are never regularly high and dry for want of a companion so long as we can get pen, ink and paper.

So he rambles on, telling us of the joys of fox-hunting, or of the minor ones of hare-hunting, describing odd characters, inveighing against the racing which has become a mere betting match, and against the battue which is slaughter without sport; reviling bad farmers and bad landlords; grumbling at the villainous discomforts and still more villainous charges of country inns, the coldness and robbery of town hotels, and thence praising the development of clubs which give the country squire a home from home. Great also are the feasts, deep and potent the libations, which revive the heroes of that Homeric age of hunting; for whatever Surtees may be talking about, the adventures of the chase are the background, where they are not the immediate theme. And, after all, he lived in the glorious age of which his friend Nimrod (Apperley) wrote, which Scrutator (Horlock) knew, when

Osbaldestone, the Squire *par excellence*, was alive ; when the names of Warde and Assheton Smith were to be conjured with, and the hunt could still attract good painters. It was the age, again, of eccentrics, when the name of Tom Mytton was a household word, and jail-birds would palm themselves off as captains in great houses.

It was just this eccentricity, this " excess," which gave material to the man whose comic vein ran in the mould of the humours. But his humours are nearly all what he called " snobs "—namely, to follow Thackeray's definition, as no doubt he himself did, those who " meanly admire mean things." For him the snob is not so much the man who looks down upon others as it is for us, but those who are like Mr. Sponge, " wishing to be gentlemen without knowing how," thinking that all that is needed is a tolerable amount of cash, an intolerable deal of splash, and a capacity for bullying the under-dog—just as Miss Rosa, too well bred ever to show that she enjoyed anything, thought nothing of working the unfortunate milliner all night so that she might appear in a new bonnet at the next day's picnic. Nearly all his characters are people trying to make a show and to rise in the world by dishonourable means—Soapey Sponge,

Facey Romford, the A.D.C. at Handley Cross, who by the ingenious initials disguised the fact that he was only the Assistant Drains Commissioner—and a dozen others, even Jorrocks himself in the Hillingdon Hall stage. Or else they are people of reasonably good position trying meanly to improve it, or to keep it up by mercenary marriages—Jawleyford, Admiration Jack, Captain Miserrimus Doleful—and again a dozen others. There are few likeable people; and they, as a rule, are very minor characters, such as Charley Stobbs, the only exception of full-length size being Thomas Scott, the owner of Hawbuck Grange, a charming, sensible, modest person, who loved hunting for hunting's sake, and not for the glamour, nor the hard riding, nor the appetite, nor the opportunities for horse-coping. A real love of hunting, of course, redeemed anyone for Surtees, as it does Jorrocks, or Lord Scamperdale, or Facey Romford; a pretended love would damn an angel, as it does those who are by no means angels—the Duke of Tergiversation, Jack Bunting, Puff, the richest commoner in England, and so on. But just occasionally the real "humour" is invented for its own sake, as the altogether delightful, wheezing, puffing, bellows-to-mend Jogglebury Crowdey, consumed by his passion for cutting walking-sticks

from hedges, and carving them in likenesses of famous men to provide fortunes for his children. And, of course, there is Pigg.

But in the main, as a result of his satirical bent, for Surtees had taken the Becky Sharp leaf out of *Vanity Fair*, most of his people are unlovable. One loves Pickwick, who owed his birth to Jorrocks, as one does not love Jorrocks; and that is because Pickwick is a lineal descendant of Uncle Toby, whereas Jorrocks derives rather from Commodore Trunnion. Perhaps it is necessary to be a trifle sentimental to make a lovable character, and there is nothing sentimental in Surtees; there is, indeed, no sentiment. Or, failing sentimentality, some quality of subtlety is necessary—something of the subtlety, shall we say, of Becky Sharp as opposed to the hard surface of Lucy Glitters, who is all on the outside, not having had the advantage of an education at the Pinkerton Academy. All Surtees's girls are nasty little monkeys, without heart or passion, however pretty they may be, except Jorrocks's niece, Belinda: all his women aspire meanly after mean things. Then what is there in Surtees which makes us read him? In what channel does the stream of his vitality run? For it is that in the last resort which makes us take down any book from our shelves.

His fame really rests upon *Handley Cross*. *Sponge* is entertaining, certainly; it has something of the creative vigour of the master work; *Ask Mamma* perhaps comes next, coupled with *Facey Romford*; *Hawbuck Grange* is a treasure to the hunting man; *Plain or Ringlets* is interesting as a light on manners, and does at least contain that brilliant comic invention, the Jug. *Hillingdon Hall* is a slough of dullness, for, apart from hunting, Surtees could make little of Jorrocks. In fact, the more hunting, the more fun. And here, perhaps, is another clue to his persistence: he knew more about hunting than any other novelist of the nineteenth century. Trollope, you may suggest; but it is doubtful if Trollope knew much about the niceties of the chase; his myopia prevented him from seeing much of hounds, and it is probable that he never knew whether it was the dog or the bitch pack that was out, what sort of cast the huntsman was making, nor when hounds should be lifted and when allowed to work out the line for themselves. He knew, indeed, how the field ought to behave, and shrewdly observed its members, striking out some good hunting characters in his own inimitable way. There is Lever, who is hardly read; and there is Whyte Melville, but he cared more about riding than about

hunting. With Surtees, however, we are let into the secrets of the stable and the kennel; we know, for instance, that Jorrocks hunted a mixed pack, what he fed his hounds on, and how he made up his entry. By inference, or rather by caricature, he tells us what a good horse, a good pack, a good huntsman, a good anything down to a good pair of boots ought to be like: he has as much information to give us as Beckford and Nimrod combined, and a beginner can learn as much from Mr. Jorrocks's sporting "lectors"—supported equally though they were by Beckford and brandy—as from, say, Lord Willoughby de Broke's *Hunting the Fox*, provided, of course, that he is sharp enough to see when Surtees is fooling and when he is not. And, besides, he rubs in the important lesson that hunting is to be pursued for the sport, to see hounds, and not for any extraneous reason of snobbery, showing off, hard riding, or other irrelevance:

> Some people fancy hard riding an indispensable quality for a sportsman; but we believe, if we were to canvass the sporting world, we should find that the real lovers of hunting are anything but a hard-riding set. Fond of seeing hounds work, they use their horses as a sort of auxiliary to their legs, and having got a good lift across a field, they are all the abler to compete with a hedge, when they come across one, which they feel they would have to take, even on foot.

There is nothing of the cut 'em down spirit about Surtees: he would ride if need be, but he would always think of his horse. The psychologist might perhaps scent disappointment, and behold the wish-fulfilment illustrated in the run in which Soapey Sponge took the horn from the huntsman and killed the fox single-handed; or when, on New Year's Day, in a hard frost, his tremendous gallop enabled him to catch the fox and Lucy Glitters at one and the same time; but even the most sober riders may be guilty of dreams. Nor was Surtees a snob, even in hunting, in the way that Nimrod was; he despised the carted stag variety, it is true, for "When you've catched the stag, you're no better off than ye were afore," as Jimmy observed to Mr. Romford; but he was friends with the currant-jelly men: the excellent Major Yammerton is not held up to ridicule, and one of the best descriptions of a hunt is that of the hare with the Goose and Dumpling folk in *Hawbuck Grange*.

Yet with all these qualities, to which must be added his observant eye—there is no excuse for a reader not to know how any one of the characters was dressed on any occasion—we have probably been rioting after hare; and the fox of his popularity is the creative capacity, the *vis comica*, and the gift for racy language

which inform *Handley Cross*. Jorrocks is without doubt an imaginative creation; he is of the race of immortal and divine fat men. In a sense he is the Falstaff of the chase; for he is something of a fairy, with a superb gift for variegated invective—though perhaps Lord Scamperdale beats him here—and unanswerable repartee. Like Dr. Johnson, he was called a bear, and scorned your clarety wines. He may not be so gentle as Mr. Pickwick, but he is almost as gullible, which is to say that he has something about him of the heavenly simpleton which is the mark of the great comic character. We do a little love Jorrocks, and are sorry when his wife bundles him into a lunatic asylum. James Pigg, again, is a creation whom Tom Jones surely is not ashamed to be seen with in Hades, perhaps even walking with him hand in hand, "like the sign of the Mutual Insurance hoffice," as the M.F.H. would say. And if Surtees is often boisterously burlesque, and in this he is not as bad as Smollett, he can be sly as well; he has some delicious pieces of cool irony, while his *à pédant pédant et demi* treatment of Nimrod as Pomponius Ego is real though friendly satire. We may suspect him also of having a dig at his friend Apperley in the description Lord Scamperdale gives his "double" Jack

Spraggon, of "the finest run that *ever* was seen," for his Lordship abandons his usual blunt vernacular to reel off pure *Nimrod*. *Handley Cross*, undoubtedly, is more various than any other of Surtees's books, and rises to greater comic heights. The scene where the genial madman entertains Charley Stobbs at breakfast after the Ongar Park run, finally clapping his saucer on his head and throwing his cup through the window-pane, has a flavour of Borrow, and all the actual hunting scenes have the wisdom of Beckford added to a discriminating observation. He also has something of the genius needed to make the great comic phrase which reveals the aspirations and weaknesses of humanity. "What a huntsman I should be if it weren't for the leaps!": most of us say that in one connection or another. Most delicious of all, perhaps, is Jorrocks's sigh as he pounded along all elbows and legs, rib-roasting Arterxerxes, on the great Cat and Custard Pot day; "How I wish I was a heagle!" That is as profound, if not as touching as "'I wish, Trim,' said my uncle Toby, 'that I was in bed.'"

Thus, although for many the main interest of *Handley Cross* lies in the talk of horses and hounds, it is not only to those that have "the bump of Fox-un-ta-tiveness werry strongly

deweloped " that the book appeals. For there is the little world of the watering-place, with its rival doctors Roger Swizzle and Sebastian Mello, with the preposterous Mrs. Barnington, and the mournful Master of the Ceremonies, done with great zest and an eye for the absurd ; and there is that very Dickensian glimpse of seamy London life, with its dingy lawyers' offices, which Surtees knew at first hand, with the strange, sinister figure of Mr. William Bowker, hatching great schemes in the murk of his tobacco shop, and patronizing dog-fights. Surtees, one feels it at every point, had more than the mere novelist's eye which suffices the second-rate novelist ; he had the knowledge which comes from an active interest in the doings of men. His range was limited, his apprehensions were not profound, he had no peculiar sensibility, he was, no doubt, rather too complacent ; but the whiff of good strong country air is with him wherever he goes. He took a vast delight in life, its ins and outs, its queer characters, its shifts and changes, its unexpectedness.

And this brings us to the last of his claims to popularity, his joyful use of words ; for after all it is for their words we read authors as much as for what they have to tell us. Idiom is the salt which keeps fresh the meat

which might otherwise have lost its savour. Surtees is full of phrases, not unforgettable, certainly, but which make their mark so that we remember them with a smile when we meet them again—there is, to give one instance, "the tremendous discharge of popularity" which greeted Major Yammerton's speech at Lord Ladythorne's hunt breakfast. But it is rather the vigour, the brio, of the tumbling flow of words which carries us on, whether he is describing a meet or a meal, a dance or a journey; all the clash and clatter is there. He is careless in his writing, no doubt, repeating phrases such as "Third time is killing time"; every comfortable house he describes is "replete" with luxury; the horse "like Gil Blas' mule—all faults," is his veritable King Charles's head. But what does that matter when Lord Scamperdale enlarges the scope of the language in a way that our armies in Flanders would have delighted in; and when Mr. Jorrocks says "Jest put 'em on to me Charley, whilst I make one o' Mr. Craven Smith's all-round-my-'at casts, for that beggar Binjimin's of no more use with a pack of 'ounds than a hopera box would be to a cow, or a frilled shirt to a pig"? And what could be more ludicrous than the master's concluding a panegyric of himself as a huntsman with a quotation from

Cato: "It's not for mortals to command success"?

And even if the words do not linger in the "mind's memory"—there is a Jorrocks's phrase again!—it is they which give vividness to the people they describe. In the general atmosphere of bustle and movement the figures stand out, and not altogether as puppets. One would recognize them anywhere by their looks alone (for who would fail to greet Sir Harry Scattercash with his strings all flying?); or by their gestures (cannot you hear Mr. Benjamin Buckram letting the coins slide down his pocket, one by one, or in an avalanche?); and one would recognize their horses, for who would not be ashamed to see Arterxerxes or Multum-in-Parvo go by without knowing them by name? But in letting the mind wander over the novels it is detached scenes or gestures that we see, phrases that we hear: Mr. Jorrocks dashes his vig and dances with glee about the fox's corpse; or he is floundering through Pinch-me-Near Forest; or drowning in the bath at Ongar Park: Soapey Sponge cannons into Lord Scamperdale, who screams out "Just because you think I'm a Lord and can't swear or use coarse words," before launching out into one of his most lurid torrents; Facey Romford gets his hounds round him with the help of

his pretended sister, the late Lucy Glitters; Mr. Jogglebury Crowdey wheezes where the verbs ought to be, and Sir Harry replaces his nouns with a hiccup; that good sportsman Mr. Jovey Jessop gives the office of Jug to his friend Boyston, who is thereby empowered to drink all that his patron cannot hold; Binjimin sticks his fingers into the marmeylad; old Sivin-and-four's-Ilivin the banker counts his bills; Gabriel Junks the peacock prophesies the weather; Mr. Jorrocks in the ecstasy of his fox-hunting dreams kicks his wife out of bed; and over all of them hovers the airy spirit of James Pigg, that racy *lusus naturae*, or loose 'un by nature, invoking Canninewcassel and his cousin Deavilboger, and keeping the tambourine a-rowling while he offers you a gob of tobacco.

MODERN LANDSCAPES

By Clough Williams-Ellis, F.R.I.B.A

WE have begun to talk, some of us, whether hopefully or with despair according to our bias and experience, of what has come to be called the " modern landscape." What exactly that term connotes seems, however, to be rather doubtful. Does it mean the aspect of the earth's surface where it has been most modified by recent human activities, or our imagined conception thereof when it has been more completely subjected to our constructive and destructive abilities than is yet anywhere the case (at least in England), and is therefore a dream of the future rather than a fact of the present ? As, however, the " modern landscape," so called, has champions amongst those whose views we must respect, it may, I think, be assumed that what they approve is not such half-baked mechanized landscapes as are already imposed on the traditional English background, but their vision of what such a landscape *might* be, if

carried out skilfully and efficiently to its logical conclusion.

The rather tatterdemalion examples that are all we have as yet got to judge by in this country need a good deal of filling-in and tidying-up by the eye of faith before they can seem acceptable to that small minority that really uses its eyes and is capable of experiencing either pain or pleasure according to what it sees.

In her entertaining book *Dangerous Ages*, Miss Rose Macaulay set out to show that danger dogged one's footsteps as persistently as one's shadow from cradle to grave—that no particular age was notably safer than any other. Though probably true of the human span of life, it is surely not so of the phases of civilization, and though most generations would have claimed that their times were peculiarly difficult and out-of-joint, I do think ours is exceptional in claiming that distinction with some show of justice. What we can probably all agree is that the most dangerous ages are those at which the normal rate of change is most abnormally accelerated, and judged by that test, we are surely living more dangerously now than at any time since we took the incalculable risks involved by adopting an upright carriage, or of kindling fire.

Perhaps an all-knowing being would say

that this was an impossible and unfair moment at which to attempt any sort of stocktaking, or the making of any general report. He would see us all running about much faster than ever before, but with singularly little apparent purpose or at any rate *sustained* purpose. Hither and thither we dart amongst new wonders that the few have discovered and that few understand or know how to use for the true happiness either of themselves or of their fellows. We are seen in our shirt-sleeves, agitated, uncertain, feverish, puzzled, amongst a mass of unfinished things; of experiments that may lead backwards or downwards, and of yet other experiments or ideas that may lead us, for all we know, quite literally to the stars.

We are not merely at the cross-roads, but at the criss-cross-roads—in the melting-pot, in the troubled waters, or wherever else you like in the whole wide world of metaphor that indicates that we do not know whether we are coming or going, on our head or our heels, or whether it is Christmas or Easter! It is an age of beginnings, a provisional age that one must indeed regard as such in order not to despair. Its very movement and energy are enough to make many people both happy and hopeful; the restless ones who are most truly of their age

and to whose unreflective minds mere change can pass for progress, unsuspected and unchallenged.

I wish we could get along with this business of accelerating, retarding or reversing time, though I suppose someone monkeying with the controls will run us crashing backwards into the last ice-age within ten minutes of the formula being perfected.

But barring any such exterminating catastrophe, how pleasant it would be to back one's own little ribband of time—alone, and ever so carefully—back into the Augustan Age in Eighteenth Century England! I should back in—there or thereabouts—regularly once a quarter. Of course, one would be disappointed in many things, scandalized and outraged even, but I do feel it would be soothing and refreshing and would give one what we now so notably lack, poise, dignity and urbanity, at any rate in the outward form of things.

It is true enough that we have many advantages and qualities that the eighteenth and all other centuries seem to have lacked, at any rate in England, such as cleanliness, kindness to animals, the sympathetic understanding of children, birth-control, an Administration and Bench relatively incorrupt, a chastening doubt with regard to power and privilege and the

beginnings of a belief in the Divine Right of all. As human beings, there is, I think, quite a lot to be said for us as against our great-great-grandfathers. Morally, practically, and even intellectually we may hold our heads high in the procession of the ages. We have a right to comport ourselves with a proper human dignity, a right that the eighteenth century at large had far less obviously than ourselves, yet exercised with such consummate mastery and finish. The wine of its civilization may have been in many ways inferior, but it was at least contained in a cunningly wrought and very beautiful vessel.

We English of to-day may be a great people—or perhaps the parents or grandparents of a great people. But if we were to be judged by that which we are so feverishly yet carelessly constructing as the background of our lives, we should surely be counted as quite lamentable muddlers, making a sad mess of our country, with very little sense of order, seemliness, dignity, or even efficiency, and none at all of that discipline without which there can be no assured or permanent freedom. Aloofly reproachful stand the remnants of Georgian England, their gracious urbanity as far removed from the hectic Saturnalia of ugliness in which we are squandering our inheritance as

from the picturesque disarray of the Middle Ages.

Justly to appraise the merits of the modern landscape we ought to compare it with those of other times. Let that engaging Welshman, Geoffrey of Monmouth, author of the first native guide-book to Great Britain, show us his contemporary countryside :

Britain, best of islands, lieth in the Western Ocean betwixt Gaul and Ireland, and containeth eight hundred miles in length and two hundred in breadth. Whatsoever is fitting for the use of mortal men the island doth afford in unfailing plenty. For she aboundeth in metals of every kind ; fields hath she, stretching far and wide, and hillsides meet for tillage of the best, whereon, by reason of the fruitfulness of the soil, the divers crops in their season do yield their harvests. Forests also hath she, filled with every manner of wild deer, in the glades whereof groweth grass that the cattle may find therein meet change of pasture, and flowers of many colours that do proffer their honey unto the bees that flit ever busily about them. Meadows hath she, set in pleasant places, green at the foot of misty mountains, wherein be sparkling well-springs, clear and bright, flowing forth with gentle awhispering ripple in shining streams that sing sweet lullaby unto them that lie upon their banks. Watered is she, moreover, by lakes and rivers wherein is much fish, and besides the narrow river of the southern coast whereby men make voyage unto Gaul, by three noble rivers, Thames, to wit, Severn and Humber, the which she stretcheth forth as it were three arms whereby she

taketh in the traffic from overseas, brought hither from every land in her fleets.

That was an enchanted and enchanting land that gave way little by little before human activity and enterprise, losing something, gaining much, until there came a time when England, as I verily believe, stood forth as the loveliest thing that God and man had ever made between them. There is a cloud of witness to this effect, the painters Canaletto, Scott, Gainsborough, Constable, Morland, Turner, Willson, Crome, Cotman, Cox and the rest, and writers and poets without number. They pictured what they loved and what we have largely lost—for ever.

And to what have we lost it, this comely, ordered Arcady, with its gracious market towns and homely villages, as instinct with local individuality and tradition as the speech of their inhabitants? For what have we exchanged these good, these very English things?

Two days ago I stood on the edge of a Sussex common; a neglected quickset hedge enclosed a squatter's homestead—half-timbered and thatched, dilapidated, abandoned. That was the only reminder of the old and immemorial England that the name of their country still conjures up for such unrealistic sentimentalists who have been long exiled in the ends of the

earth and who still read Miss Austen, Trollope and Hardy and occasionally see the charming photographs of rural scenes in our *Country Life*.

But what was the rest of my view that November afternoon? I stood on a sixty-foot reinforced concrete motor-way along which hooted and thundered an immense and largely unnecessary traffic at an extravagant speed between uncompromising palisades of steel and concrete. Beyond the dirty drab of the concrete kerbs, heaps of broken asphalt littered the weed-grown waste, from which rose gigantic black telegraph posts on the one hand and electric power pylons of latticed steel upon the other, so forcing horsemen and walkers alike relentlessly on to the unyielding surface of the oil-stained road. A few yards from the Common's end stood a shed of corrugated iron that a score of eye-splitting signs in crude enamels proclaimed to be a garage. Opposite stood a flimsy bungalow with pink asbestos roof and a grimcrack verandah enclosed with coloured glass announcing that it was "The Lucky Dip Café." Beyond this place of refreshment lies an honest turnip field, but lest its valuable road-frontage should be wasted, it is partly obscured by three enormous notice-boards. One announces that bungalow plots may be bought thereon at 1*s.* 2*d.* a square yard freehold, and

the others, severally and vociferously, that two sorts of beer (that are popularly supposed to be rivals but which the "City" knows to be "interlocking") are respectively and indisputably "the Best."

The beech grove that used to shade the road on the other side has been felled for firewood and has not been replanted, though the now dismal acre cannot strictly speaking be said to be without timber, as a large hoarding of Baltic deal, advertising an American serial, has replaced our native trees. At the cross-roads a little chalet like an earth-closet, in waspish black and yellow, is labelled "A.A. Telephone Box," and just beyond it the bungalows begin in earnest, as it is only a mile or so into the little town of Blankminster.

One used to enter the town from this London side through an avenue of elms, but local surveyors have been brought up with a superstitious fear for elms; so when the estate that they adorned was sold to a speculator, and then broken up and re-sold in lots, down came the eight hundred old trees and up went two or three hundred perky little houses. The old William-and-Mary Manor House was, of course, demolished—the smoke from the new factory that had somehow been allowed to place itself between the house and the Minster, so as to

discharge its poisonous and evil-smelling effluent conveniently into the river, had long since spoilt the ancient amenities of the place and had driven away, first the trout, then the rooks and finally the family itself. The great factory chimney now dominates the town where the church steeple was once supreme, the elegant little Georgian Town Hall has just been effectively crushed and put in its place by a four-storied multiple store of plate-glass and terra-cotta that replaced an authentic half-timbered merchant's house of the fifteenth century. A large part of the south side of the old High Street was pulled down three or four years ago to make room for traffic, and quite unnecessarily, as this destruction did not solve the problem and a new by-pass road has now been made through the North Ward Allotments. However, this wholesale demolition of half the High Street gave the multiple shops their chance which they did not hesitate to take, and that is why one side of the street now looks like Barchester and the other like the Wrath of God.

Well, that is a picture that can be matched from all over England, and it is not a picture that I can pretend to like. If that is "modern landscape," I would have none of it—I can find no merit in the shoddy or the slipshod or in

the arrogant destruction of old beauty when we are impotent to create new. But wise and sensitive people like Mr. Eric Gill who have kind things to say of the modern landscape must, I think, mean something quite other than what I have described. They have doubtless seen what I have seen in more enlightened lands, in Scandinavia and Germany particularly, where the new things needed for the new way of life are done triumphantly, with dignity and with pride and yet without disdain for those things that, being of another age, are yet honourable and lovely emblems of a civilization that may yet be held superior to our own.

LOOKING BACK ON LIFE

By the Very Rev. W. R. Inge, D.D., K.C.V.O., Dean of St. Paul's

"THE days of our age are three score years and ten," wrote the Psalmist at a time when comparatively few reached this allotted span of life. Actually, the tables of the Registrar-General inform me that my expectation of life on my seventieth birthday is 8·53 years, though if I had belonged to the superior sex, I might have looked forward to 9·58 years. These figures do not interest me much. My life's work, in any case, is nearly done and I shall be quite ready to go whenever my call comes. An old man, when he thinks about himself, dwells on the past rather than on the future.

Memory is a strange faculty. We look back over a mist-covered country, in which certain peaks rise up very clearly, while patches of the plain are also in bright sunlight. The rest is dimmed, and much of it has disappeared altogether. The selection seems capricious.

Many of the things which we remember most vividly are quite unimportant, and of some of them we may suspect that they have stuck in our minds just because they were not characteristic.

We turn hot or cold, according to our temperament, when we remember with shame certain things which we did long ago. But these are not our habitual faults, but stupid blunders which we never meant to commit—thoughtless actions which looked like ingratitude, hasty expressions which were cruel or unjust, even breaches of good manners which have probably been long forgotten by those who witnessed them. Things done, seen, or suffered for the first time stand out vividly; they have cut a new channel in our minds, which has never filled up.

Our first home and its inmates remain very clearly in our memories; when we revisit the old familiar scenes we recognize them at once, though we thought they were on a larger scale. Later impressions are much weaker, just as we can still repeat the poetry and even prose which we learned by heart as children, though now if we laboriously learn a sonnet it will be half-gone a week hence.

Have we been happy? Well, we are never either so happy or so miserable as we thought

ourselves to be, and when we think of the past we shall probably admit with a rueful grin that half our troubles consisted in anticipating misfortunes which never came. But here again memory is treacherous. The good old times may not have been so good while we lived through them, and our troubles—the real ones—did not always occupy our minds.

Still, my own experience is that the question can be answered. I have no doubt that for the first twenty-eight years of my life the balance was on the wrong side. The causes were almost entirely subjective. I was a painfully shy, nervous and anxious child; and at Eton and Cambridge I worked much harder than any boy who cares for his health and happiness ought to work.

Ambition is either the luxury of the happy and confident, or the refuge of the anxious and despondent; in my case it was certainly the latter. But from thirty onwards, and especially since my marriage, I have no doubt that my balance has been on the right side; I have been, on the whole, a happy man. I wonder whether this is a normal experience. We usually think of youth as the happiest part of life; I have not found it so. But I could not say with Browning, "Grow old along with me,

The best is yet to be." To watch oneself becoming a back number and a fossil cannot be a pleasant experience, even if our friends find it out sooner than we do, and hide it from us with ironical civility. I think middle age is the best time, if we can escape the fatty degeneration of the conscience which often sets in at about fifty.

But it is a poor thing to think about our own happiness. What does it matter whether we are happy or not? We were sent into the world to do and to be something, to cultivate a little bit of garden, to defend a little bit of line, to pay our footing in the world in one way or another. If we are Christians, we believe also that we are on our probation as immortal spirits. The question which demands an answer, more and more insistently, as life draws to a close, is whether we have used our lives well or made a mess of them. What have we to show for the five talents, or two, or one, which were committed to us? Not much will be demanded of the man with one talent, and the man with five usually gets plenty of encouragement; but how many men with two talents seem to be preparing their napkin! However, it is not for us to answer this question. We may feel satisfaction or remorse; but it may be that neither is justified.

An old German philosopher, Richard Rothe, writes :

> A retrospect of my whole life, from the earliest period of my recollection down to the present hour, leaves me with this impression, that I have been and am being guided by a gracious and mighty Hand, which has made and is making that possible to me which otherwise would have been impossible. O that I had always trusted and yielded myself to its guidance.

I must say quite simply that I feel the same. I do not mean that I can trace what are called special providences, or that I have been always saved from bad mistakes. Still less can I say that the discipline has been always gentle. The mere inheritance of such a temperament as I have described might be called an injustice if we could put in a claim to be always enjoying our lives. But I can make my own the words, " Hitherto hath the Lord helped me " ; and my conviction of this loving care has grown stronger with me as the years go on. This experience I believe to be normal, and it is the most natural explanation of the fact that most agnostics, if they live to old age, end by believing in God, though they may not be orthodox Christians. In a matter of this kind we need not think of " senile decay." It is the experience of life when life is prolonged to its natural termination, which in many cases—judging by

their writings—has taught sceptics to become religious.

"The years that bring the philosophic mind" gradually change the cocksure Radical into a cautious Whig, and the Whig into a despondent Tory. We cannot help it; it is human nature. The average age of our population rises year by year. Will this tend to stability in our institutions, or to a timid disinclination to try new experiments? Well, the young people have got votes, and mean to use them. They cannot make a much worse hash of the world than their elders have done.

A. J. B.

A Character Sketch

By the Rt. Hon. Augustine Birrell, K.C., LL.D.

LORD BALFOUR'S character, and most emphatically he possessed one (hence the interest that will always be felt for him), was complex and even complicated. No one, I imagine, is in a position to say what was his ruling passion, "strong in death." But for all that, he was no stranger to human passions, and on several even public occasions, he exhibited large bits of many of them, but never any in a marked degree. Consequently, being what he was, one of the most interesting figures of his time, he has long been a theme of general conversation. Was he this, was he that?

I have often heard it debated at length, had he any heart? If he had a heart, he did not, if I may parody an old-fashioned epigram, get his speeches by it, for his nonchalance was a great part of their charm. In this general conversation, everybody who knew him, how-

ever slightly, both men and women—particularly the latter—felt free to take part. And now that he has left, to the grief of many of us, the world he neither worshipped nor turned his back upon, this conversation shows no signs of abatement. It is indeed not impossible that A. J. B. may become a legendary character, being, as he was, so interesting and out of the common run of men. Active politicians, as a rule, seldom remain interesting very long, for if they are really prominent politicians, and not merely flotsam and jetsam, floating for a while on the surface of party strife, they become imbedded in history, and soon grow into the same category as "old, unhappy, far-off things and battles long ago," if I may quote a familiar tag of verse—Lord Balfour once kept the whole House of Commons waiting for at least two minutes whilst he was ransacking his frail verbal memory in a vain attempt to recover those more than half-forgotten words.

If ever there was an interesting man it was Arthur Balfour, and when such a man dies, at a ripe old age, a host of friends spring up like mushrooms round a fallen trunk in the fields, and the air becomes thick with anecdotes. Nor is there anything inhuman in this. Dr. Newman, indeed, in one of his Catholic sermons, has a scorching, skin-blistering paragraph in

which he deals with this incident. He imagines the friends of a dead man of this description extolling his memory. "His readiness in speech, his fertility of thought—so comprehensive a mind, such a power of throwing light on a perplexed subject and bringing conflicting ideas or facts into harmony!" "Such a speech it was he made on such and such an occasion. I happened to be present and shall never forget it." Or, "It was the saying of a very sensible man," or "A great personage whom some of us know," or "Never was his equal in society, so just in his remarks, so lively, so versatile, so unobtrusive," and so on. Well, well! Why not? "Men are we and must grieve"—when a man we have greatly admired passes away.

One thing was plain about Arthur Balfour. He had a philosophy of life. What it was may be a matter for speculation, but that he had one is certain. That it was a sceptical philosophy is plain enough, for that at least he has made plain in his writings. It does not follow from this that he had no positive belief of his own, or had never committed an "act of faith." A sceptical philosophy has laid the foundation stones of many Creeds. Newman and Mr. W. G. Ward, that sturdy Ultramontane, based themselves upon scepticism, and spent most of

their argumentative lives in stopping up the holes in which many honest folk in their pursuit of truth had been accustomed to find shelter.

A. J. B. was, so it always appeared to me, naturally indisposed to believe anything resting on human testimony, for if there was one quality of mind he disliked most it was "cocksuredness." I cannot bring myself to believe that he ever really entertained any grave doubts as to the authenticity of most of the great plays usually attributed by tradition to Shakespeare, yet he was never inclined to treat the question as settled. "How could any such question be considered as definitely settled?" Nor was he disposed to pay much attention to the judgments of men of alleged æsthetic taste upon works of art, books, plays, pictures, buildings, etc. He did not consider himself bound by authorities, dealing subjectively, and varying in each generation. His "Romanes Lecture" on "Beauty and Criticism" is a genuine bit of Balfourism, and gives one a peep into the lecturer's mind. This inbred scepticism of his would probably always have prevented him from becoming a pioneer in any movement other than a purely scientific one. Had he, for example, ages ago been born in Antioch, I cannot think he would have been one of the inhabitants who were first

called Christians in that city, and if he had lived in the days of Clarkson and Wilberforce he would, I expect, have discovered many good features in the ancient Institution of Domestic Slavery. And which of us would have had any right to blame him? Do we all rush to join despised minorities? When asked whether it was not just a little dull to belong to a party that first opposed and then passed (on its own account) the pet measures of their opponents—he would answer "No. Delay is as important as progress." A good motto for some of Lord Balfour's books and speeches would be *Croyez-moi, l'erreur aussi a son mérite.*

Whether a political life was Lord Balfour's deliberate choice, I do not know, yet his dialectical gifts, carefully trained at Cambridge—and he was emphatically a Cambridge man—fitted him for some of the aspects of that way of life, whilst his philosophy rendered him almost impervious to the stray arrows of "outrageous fortune," and the bad company he often had to keep in the course of his duties.

I saw him once on a very wet day in Manchester during a General Election being drawn through the dirty streets on the top of an open charabanc, surrounded by his committee, and yet I could not discern upon a countenance admirably suited for the expression of the

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